

Freethought Today

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March 2015

Federal court OKs equal access for Michigan atheist

In a victory for religious freedom, U.S. Magistrate Judge Michael Hluchaniuk approved a settlement Feb. 23 ordering the city of Warren, Mich., to let an atheist set up a “reason station” in city hall after the Freedom From Religion Foundation, American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State sued the city for allowing only a “prayer station” in the public building.

The settlement requires the city to treat nonbelievers equally by permitting plaintiff and FFRF member Douglas Marshall to establish a secular alternative to the “prayer station” a church group has staffed since 2009.

The city has permitted prayer station volunteers to distribute religious pamphlets, offer to pray with passersby and discuss religious beliefs with them. Marshall submitted an application last April to reserve atrium space for two days a week. He planned to offer philosophical discussions with those who expressed an interest in a secular belief system.

Less than two weeks after it was submitted, Marshall’s application, although nearly identical to one submitted by the church sponsoring the prayer station, was rejected by Mayor James Fouts. In his rejection letter, Fouts accused Marshall of “intending to deprive all organized religions of their constitutional freedoms or at least discourage the practice of religion.”

Fouts publicly compared atheists to Nazis: “Just like I allow a celebration of Martin Luther King to go in city hall. I would not allow someone from the White Citizens Council, the Klu Klux Klan or the American Nazi Party to put up a stand, because they disparage other ethnic groups.”

Noting that the atrium was established as a public space to be reserved by a wide variety of groups and individuals, the ACLU of Michigan and the national ACLU worked with Americans United and FFRF to file the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in July 2014.

The settlement says the secular station must “be allowed to operate on terms not less favorable” than terms granted to the prayer station and “there shall be no restriction on the content of the materials” on its table. The city agreed to pay the ACLU Fund of Michigan \$100,000 for costs, damages and attorney fees.

“This settlement serves as a reminder that government officials have no business deciding which religious messages can and cannot be allowed into our public spaces,” said Dan Korobkin, deputy legal director of the ACLU of Michigan and lead counsel.

“We’re delighted to see equality and reason prevail in Warren,” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “We admire Douglas Marshall for his gumption in pursuing this, are grateful for the wonderful representation by the ACLU of Michigan and look forward



Celebrating the “reason station” victory are (left) ACLU attorneys Marc Allen, Daniel Korobkin and Michael Steinberg and FFRF plaintiff Doug Marshall (third from left).

to working with Douglas and other area members in erecting a reason station in the city hall atrium.”

“This settlement protects the rights of freethinkers and nontheists,” said Alex Luchenitser, Americans United associate legal director. “It’s also an important reminder to government bodies that they must play fair when it comes to freedom of speech. They don’t have the right to favor religious viewpoints over others.”

“This result is a complete win for our side and for the First Amendment,” said Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. “It makes clear that

city hall should be open to everyone, not just those who share government officials’ religious beliefs.”

The settlement doesn’t make Fouts happy. On March 4, he told C&G News that he was going to make free “In God We Trust” posters available to the public through his office.

In addition to Korobkin and Mach, Marshall is represented by Luchenitser and Ayesha Khan of Americans United, Rebecca Markert and Patrick Elliott of FFRF, Michael Steinberg and Marc Allen of the ACLU of Michigan and ACLU of Michigan cooperating attorney William Wertheimer.

Wisconsin governor’s office:

No records of Walker communication with deity

The Office of the Governor in Wisconsin has no record of communications between Gov. Scott Walker and any deities, according to the office’s legal counsel.

While it’s on the record that the governor is communicating with higher powers like billionaire and political kingmaker Sheldon Adelson, that’s where the paper trail ends.

The official denial came in response to an open records request from Edward Susterich, a Milwaukee man who is a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Susterich’s request

said:

“Since your terms as Governor, please provide a copy/transcript of all communications with God, the Lord, Christ, Jesus or any other form of deity.”

Walker, who attends a nondenominational, evangelical church and is the son of a Baptist preacher, regularly mentions his reliance on God. In January he told a group of Wisconsin bankers that he will only run for president if he felt “called” to run.

Asked later by a reporter if he was

Continued on page 3



SCOTT WALKER
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF WISCONSIN

P.O. Box 7863
MADISON, WI 53707

February 13, 2015

Edward Susterich
6061 South 19th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53221-5008
edward.susterich@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Susterich,

I am writing in regard to your email making the following records request:

“Since your terms as Governor, please provide a copy/transcript of all communications with God, the Lord, Christ, Jesus or any other form of deity.”

Pursuant to the Public Records Law, we are responding to let you know that this office does not have records responsive to your request.

This letter completes our response to your request. For your reference, enclosed below is a copy of this office’s Public Records policy. Thank you for contacting the office of Governor Scott Walker.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David J. Rabe".

David J. Rabe
Assistant Legal Counsel

Meet a legal staffer

Name: Andrew Lewis Seidel (SIGH-dle).

Where and when I was born: Jan. 31, 1982, in Woodbury, N.J.

Family: My wife Liz, who's also an FFRF staff attorney..

Education: B.S. in neuroscience and environmental science (cum laude), juris doctor (magna cum laude), Tulane University; master of laws (Outstanding LLM Award), University of Denver, Sturm College of Law.

How I came to work at FFRF: I was working in private practice in Colorado but wanted to do something more. I looked at all the state/church separation groups and atheism and humanism groups in the country. To me, FFRF has the perfect balance of atheism and separationism. We focus on helping people first, which is a bit unique in this movement.

I had already won a scholarship from FFRF for an essay I wrote for the annual contest. I used that foothold to do some volunteer work and then asked Dan and Annie Laurie to hire me full time. I believe I have a responsibility to use my law degree to make this world a better place. That's why I chose FFRF.

What I do here: I do a bit of everything, but mostly I defend Jefferson's wall of separation. I also speak around the U.S., take photos, write blogs and help write ads and serve as a general handyman around the office. Several staffers have joked that my staff attorney title is too restrictive.

What I like best about it: Every day we fight to uphold the First Amendment. Not many lawyers have that

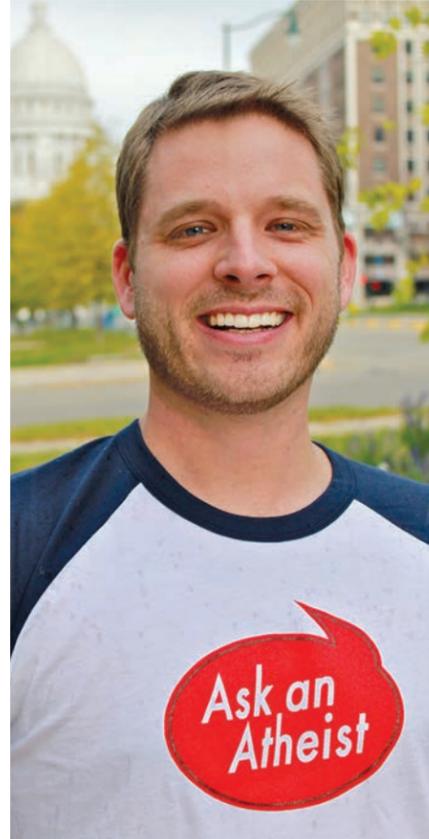
privilege. We also fight on behalf of an underrepresented minority. Helping freethinking students and families attend school, free from proselytizing or praying and preying teachers, is immensely rewarding.

What gets old about it: Playing against a stacked deck can get tiresome. We are way overmatched in funding, and courts are reluctant to decide cases in favor of an unpopular minority, even if the law is clear. The media portray us as whiny rabble-rousers. But we have reason and right on our side, and I truly believe that we will be successful.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: My family, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And the book I am working on about how Judeo-Christian principles conflict with America's founding principles. I'm almost done with the first draft.

I spend little if any time thinking about: The differences between the various religious sects. To me, it's a bit like arguing over the average height of leprechauns or what color unicorn hair is. It's all an argument over something that isn't real. The Methodist is just as wrong as the Catholic who's just as wrong as the Sikh. They're wasting their breath on differences over fictional nonsense.

My religious upbringing was: Pretty liberal. My mom encouraged me to go to different churches with my Christian friends and to temple with my Jewish friends, etc. According to my mom, I briefly wanted to convert to Judaism after attending my first bar mitzvah. That broad exposure made it pretty



Andrew Seidel (Photo by Dan Barker)

clear that no religion had a monopoly on truth. I soon realized they were probably all wrong.

My doubts about religion started: They didn't start, they were always there. I agree with Hitchens, who observed that "You don't so much as become an atheist as find out that's what you are. There's no moment of conversion. You don't suddenly think 'I don't believe this anymore.' You essentially

find you don't believe it."

Religion never made sense to me. I think it's natural for every child to doubt and question. Kids are curious. It takes religion to silence that curiosity and shut down those doubts. If humans were truly, deeply religious, they wouldn't need to attend church every week to reinforce their faith.

Things I love: Learning, traveling, reading, my wife (FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell), my family, dogs, trying to capture the beauty of nature with my camera and redemption through effort, thought and will.

Things I smite: Cruelty, bigotry, proud, confident ignorance and redemption through human sacrifice.

My favorite authors are: In no particular order, P.G. Wodehouse, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, George MacDonald Fraser, George Orwell, Christopher Hitchens, Ron Chernow, Colleen McCullough and many more.

My legal heroes are: There are so many to choose from — Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, Clarence Darrow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Earl Warren, Learned Hand (coolest name ever) and Ruth Bader Ginsburg all spring to mind.

But my true legal heroes are plaintiffs in cases like those FFRF takes: the McCollums, Ellery Schempp, Roy Torcaso, Joann Bell, Jessica Ahlquist, Max Nielson and everyone who challenges religious privilege in court. I'm in awe of their courage and willingness to stand on principle. (John Scopes also, although he was a criminal defendant and not a plaintiff.)

FFRF welcomes 18 new Lifetime Members

FFRF welcomes 18 new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation gratefully acknowledges the new Lifetime Memberships of:

Valerie Burnett, Peggy Coulson, Winifred Fleming, Jim Hudlow, Chris Jackson, Tsee Lee (gift from King Lee), Carol Montgomery, Mary Muckenhaupt, Troy B. Myers, Michal Otten (gift from Harold Saferstein), Wayne Stephen Plimmer, Narayanan Raman, James Richardson (gift from Harold Saferstein), A. Rivera, Rick Spanel, Irene Stockton (gift from Harold Saferstein), David Waters and Charlotte Watson.

States (and one Canadian province)

represented are Alabama, Arizona, California, District of Columbia, Florida, Idaho, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington and British Columbia.

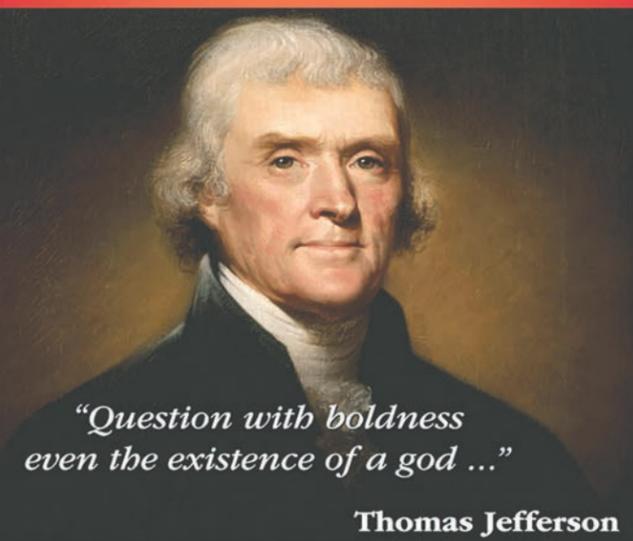
Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated for a membership or membership renewal, ensure never another renewal notice, go into rainy-day savings and are deductible for income-tax purposes to the kind donor. Lifetime Members receive a Lifetime Membership card and pin.

Warmest thanks to Charlotte, David, Hal, Rick, A., Narayanan, Wayne, Michal, Troy, Mary, Carol, King, Chris, Jim, Winifred, Peggy and Valerie!

Wisconsin Capitol

FFRF received a permit for its display, which went up March 9 in the State Capitol rotunda to counter various religious exhibits celebrating Easter.

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March 2015

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Historic Madison proposal would add atheists as protected class to city ordinance

Anita Weier, a Madison Common Council member in Madison, Wis., is the sponsor of a proposal to add atheists and the homeless as protected classes under the city's Equal Opportunities Ordinance, which offers protections in housing, employment and public accommodations. It appears to be the first such proposal in the nation.

At its initial presentation Feb. 12 before the Equal Opportunities Commission, it was referred to the employment subcommittee for discussion. A vote was set for March 12 (the day after press time for this issue) on whether to recommend passage to the council.

The EOC has been discussing adding the homeless as a protected class for more than two years. Weier told the Wisconsin State Journal that she's seeking protections for atheism because religion is already a protected class, and she thinks lack of religion should have similar guarantees. She noted that groups such as FFRF have raised concerns about discrimination.

The city already prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, color, natural origin, citizenship status, age, handicap/disability, marital status, source of income, arrest or conviction records and more.

In her blog, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor noted that the most typical discrimination FFRF has faced, locally and nationally, is refusal by companies to make its T-shirts, print its brochures or post its billboards. "We don't just have problems with free speech.

We have problems with 'paid speech.' Whether this ordinance would affect such discrimination remains to be seen. But the public has no idea how often freethought views are censored. This includes a decision by CBS last year and NBC this year to refuse to nationally air a TV ad made for us by well-known public figure Ron Reagan." (At the end of the ad, he says, "Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell.")

Gaylor suggested broadening the ordinance language to include "non-believers" or "nontheists" as well as atheists.

"Many nonreligious Madisonians may prefer other appellations to that of atheist. I like to joke that our members may call themselves by many an appellation — atheist, agnostic, skeptic, secular humanist, rationalist, non-religious, etc. — but whatever we call ourselves, we all disbelieve in the same gods."

In his testimony, FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott noted, "Having worked to protect the civil rights of nonreligious persons, I can tell you that discrimination against atheists is widespread and an ongoing concern. It permeates into employment, public schools, and even in discounts offered by places of public accommodation."

Elliott referenced his experiences halting free admission for those who attend Catholic Mass at various ethnic festivals.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel



FFRF Staff Attorneys Andrew Seidel (left) and Patrick Elliott are pictured with Anita Weier, who has introduced a proposal to add atheists as a protected class under the Equal Opportunity Ordinance in Madison, Wis. Weier is a two-term alderperson who's not seeking reelection. Elliott and Seidel testified in favor of the proposal in February at a hearing before the Equal Opportunities Commission, of which Weier is also a member. (Photo by Elizabeth Cavell)

testified about discrimination nationally, including state constitutions that unlawfully prohibit atheists from holding public office, shelters and soup kitchens that reject atheist volunteers, atheist parents being denied custody and job discrimination against model employees who are atheists. Seidel pointed to a complaint by FFRF in the 1990s which involved substantial legal fees to stop involving a Madison grocery from giving out free gallons of

milk only to those who had attended Mass.

"If any group in this country needs protection, it's the one that is least liked and most distrusted"—that is, atheists, according to surveys, Seidel said. "It's time that atheists enjoy the same protections as other Americans, and I encourage this council to set an example and take this historic first step."

Wisconsin governor's deity nonresponsive

Continued from front page

praying about the decision, Walker said he was. "Any major decision I've made in my life, politics or otherwise, I've tried to discern God's calling on."

In a 1990 interview with the Marquette University yearbook, he said, "I really think there's a reason why God put all these political thoughts in my

head."

God apparently isn't putting them on paper, however. David Rabe, assistant legal counsel for the Office of the Governor, responded on Feb. 13 to Susterich's open records request with this: "Pursuant to the Public Records Law, we are responding to let you know that this office does not have records responsive to your request."

Walker most recently caused a bit of a flap in London with his answer to a British journalist who asked if he was comfortable with the theory of evolution: "I'm going to punt on that one as well. That's a question a politician shouldn't be involved in one way or another."

Some skeptics think he dodged the question either because he doesn't give credence to the theory or that he does and didn't want to offend conservative evangelicals.

"I wish the media would press him more for details on any messages from God or about his religious beliefs

that affect political decisions (abortion, birth control, same-sex marriage, end-of-life decisions, immunizations, religious exemption for parental neglect)," Susterich said in an email after receiving the response. He's a former longtime FFRF executive board member.

In March 2014, FFRF sent a complaint letter about Walker's tweet "Philippians 4:13" on the governor's official Twitter account. The New Testament verse reads, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."

In 2009, Walker told the Christian Businessmen's Committee in Madison in 2009 that he started his "walk to Christ" when he was 13. He recalled the day he met his wife Tonette: "That night I heard Christ tell me, 'This is the person you're going to be with.'"



FFRF activist Ed Susterich pictured in the Milwaukee County Courthouse, where he placed an FFRF sign to counter a nativity scene.

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*Freedom Depends
on Freethinkers*

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.

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Some Say The World Will End In Ice

Ice storm leaves 100,000 without power.
— *New York Times*, December 21

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

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

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

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

© Philip Appleman.

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 “After-life” Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.

Philip Appleman decrees: Let there be Enlightenment

Review: *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin and the Meaning of Life*

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

Philip Appleman decrees: Let there be Enlightenment. And it is good.

Phil, a talented and compassionate poet who turned 89 in February, has had an amazing literary outpouring in his eighties. Recent books include *Karma, Dharma Pudding & Pie* (2009) and *Perfidious Proverbs & Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible*. A poet and a scholar, he is editor of the *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition, Malthus*, as well as of the classic *New and Selected Poems, 1956–1996* (1996) and *Let There Be Light* (1991).

The Labyrinth (Quantuck Lane Press, 2014), his newest work, is an elegant and wise 69-page monograph on God, Darwin and life, as its subtitle promises. Every page is rife with insights into the meaning of life and the reckoning with death.

“The large brain is the ultimate weapon, and sometimes it is aimed at us,” he muses. “We are capable of abstractions, capable of imagining things; that is part of the problem. We imagine all sorts of useful and pleasant things: wheels, shoes, poems. But the imagination refuses to stop before it is too late and proceeds to invent sinister hells, and sumptuous heavens, and miscellaneous hypotheses, such as ‘God.’”

Phil fearlessly wrestles with religion in *The Labyrinth*, and reality wins: “People in general have never exhibited much passion for the disciplined

pursuit of knowledge, but they are always tempted by easy answers. God is an easy answer.” He writes that “God” may “soothe some minds temporarily, as an empty bottle may soothe a crying baby; the nourishment from each is the same.”

It's a beautiful little hardback with a dust jacket that's also beautifully written, reasoned and true. Every paragraph is studded with secular epiphany. Each page, for me, elicited a frisson of appreciation.

As Phil untangles the knotty riddles of existence, volition, human neurosis and religion, his searing logic is tempered, always, by empathy. What we have is “the joy of human life here and now, unblemished by the dark shadow of whimsical forces in the sky. Charles Darwin's example, both in his work and in his life, helps us to understand

Hell to the Chief! Preying on the National Prayer Breakfast

Headline about conservative reaction to President Obama's comments critical of Christianity
Huffington Post, 2-9-15

He is more powerful from prison. It's proof [to his adherents] the government is after all of them and persecuting them because of their religious preference. It becomes another wedge between their reality and the outside world's.

Amy Berg, director of the documentary “Prophet's Prey,” on Warren Jeffs, head of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, imprisoned for life plus 20 years in Texas for sexual assault of minors

Variety, 1-25-15

I learned when my mother died five years ago that there is no “there” there. Structure, it's all imposed. We impose order and narrative on everything in order to understand it. Otherwise, there's nothing but chaos.

Atheist actor Julianne Moore, 54, interview

The Hollywood Reporter, 1-28-15

Millions of innocent creatures will be driven to the most horrible massacre committed by humans for ten-and-a-half centuries. A massacre which is repeated every year because of the nightmare of a righteous man about his good son.

Egyptian poet Fatima Naoot, Facebook post criticizing animal sacrifices during Eid al-Adhaon to honor the Prophet Abraham's dream in which God substituted a sheep for Abraham's son and for which she faces charges in Cairo of contempt of Islam, spreading sectarian strife and disturbing public peace

Reuters, 1-28-15

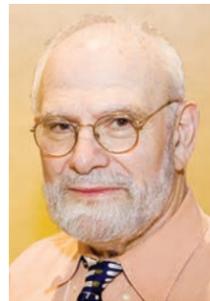
No one can argue you out of it. And ordinary words of logic do not apply.

Bernard Rollin, atheist and Colorado State University bioethicist, comparing religious belief to a juvenile romantic crush

collegian.com, 2-1-15

Overheard

I cannot pretend I am without fear. But my predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved; I have been given much and I have given something in return; I have read and traveled and thought and written. I have had an intercourse with the world, the special intercourse of writers and readers. Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure.



Neurologist Oliver Sacks, 81, FFRF honorary director and Emperor Has No Clothes honoree, op-ed announcing he has terminal cancer

The New York Times, 2-19-15

Humanity has been grappling with these questions throughout human history. And lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ.

President Barack Obama, speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast about the tension between the compassionate and murderous acts religion can inspire

The Washington Post, 2-5-15

He has offended every believing Christian in the United States. This goes further to the point that Mr. Obama does not believe in America or the values we all share.

Jim Gilmore, former Republican governor of Virginia

The Washington Post, 2-5-15

If you've never gotten on your knees and asked him to forgive you of your sins — you're just a pretty good guy or a pretty good gal? You're going to go to hell.

Prayer breakfast keynoter Darrell Waltrip, retired NASCAR driver who accepted Jesus as his savior after a 1993 crash

The Washington Post, 2-5-15



The Catholics: From celebrating Mass to appearing on atheist billboards

The following Q&A with Stephen Uhl is from Linda LaScola's Feb. 12 Rational Doubt column, which has been focusing on "Clergy Doubt." She is co-author with Daniel C. Dennett of *Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind and Preachers Who Are Not Believers*. She's also a co-founder of the Clergy Project.

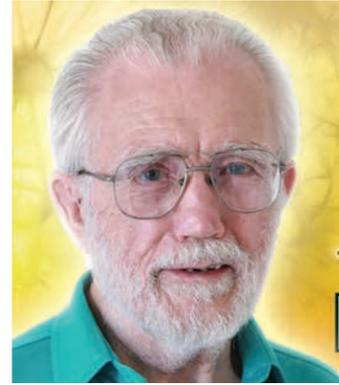
Uhl, a Ph.D. psychologist and former Catholic priest, is a major FFRF supporter and author of *Out of God's Closet*.

1. What caused you to start seriously doubting your faith?

I had always trusted Mother Church and her teachings. One of those official teachings was that the human mind, without the aid of faith, could prove God's existence. So when, in morning meditation, I saw that the official teaching of the church was based on an unwarranted assumption, I realized that the church teaching was not as infallible as that church claimed.

2. How did you initially react to the doubts (e.g., discuss them with others, keep them to yourself, do religious or secular reading, do something else)?

As best as I can now recall, after many decades have passed, I mainly



'Atheists work to make this life heavenly.'

-Dr. Stephen Uhl, Tucson. Author of *Out of God's Closet...Atheist*

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kept the doubts to myself at first. But as the doubts got strong enough for me to think of likely making a lifestyle change, I then discussed with my spiritual adviser/confessor and with the abbot.

3. What caused the doubts to start becoming stronger than your beliefs?

Once the complete blinders of faith were discarded/punctured, the more I looked at my own and others' lives and circumstances, the more clearly I could see that what I had believed for three decades was "not necessarily so."

4. How did the doubts affect your

preaching, teaching or other responsibilities or your interactions with your congregation and your family?

Whether in the classroom during the week or in the pulpit on weekends, I stayed away from most all dogmatic matters of faith while sticking to natural "golden rule" sorts of things. So I thereby avoided hypocrisy in these situations.

5. How did you come to the realization that your doubts were overcoming your beliefs, that you were no longer a believer?

Faith is blind and complete or it is

inadequate to keep a reasonable person from ditching it altogether.

6. How did you think of yourself at that time (e.g., agnostic, atheist, spiritual but not religious, nonbeliever, "different" believer, something else)?

I guess "anxious agnostic" would describe me for a while. But I think the anxiety soon became directed towards the practical details of leaving the monastery and dealing with survival details with minimum scandal for those who knew what I was doing. Philosophical agnostic but practical atheist would be the best personal descriptor for me.

FFRF sues over egregious Georgia school prayer

FFRF filed a federal lawsuit Feb. 9 challenging the infliction of daily prayer on elementary school students in the Emanuel County School System, Swainsboro, Ga.

Defendants include Superintendent Kevin Judy, Swainsboro Primary School Principal Valorie Watkins, teacher Kay-trene Bright and teacher Cel Thompson. Anonymous co-plaintiffs are Jane and John Doe and their young children, Jesse and Jamie Doe.

Before lunch, Jamie's teacher asked students to bow their heads, fold their hands and pray while Thompson led a call-and-response prayer: "God our Father, we give thanks, for our many blessings. Amen."

In Jesse's first-grade class, Bright led students in this daily prayer: "God is great. Let us thank you for our food. Thank you for our daily prayer. Thank you. Amen."

When parents learned of the prayers in August 2014, they immediately Watkins to object. The teachers responded

by telling the Doe children to leave their classrooms and sit in the hallway while the rest of their classes prayed.

"It should not be necessary for FFRF to sue over such an obvious violation of specific Supreme Court decisions barring devotions from our public schools," noted Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. "No child in our secular school system or their parents should

be subjected to prayer, or stigmatized when their parents speak up to defend the Establishment Clause. But unfortunately, it appears a lawsuit will be the only way to protect the freedom of conscience of these young children."

"If anyone needs a picture drawn on how destructive religion is in our public schools, this situation is a perfect example," added Annie Laurie Gaylor,

co-president. "The fact that such abusive practices are continuing in our public schools 63 years after the first Supreme Court decision against school prayer shows just how much FFRF's legal work is still needed."

FFRF is represented by W.R. Nichols of Atlanta, with FFRF Staff Attorneys Samuel Grover and Andrew Seidel serving as co-counsel.

FFRF opposes Colorado discrimination

FFRF has signed on to an amicus brief in support of a gay couple refused a wedding cake by a Colorado bakery owner. While it doesn't usually get involved with non-Establishment Clause issues, FFRF strongly opposes redefining "religious freedom" to include the right to discriminate.

Jack Phillips, owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, refused to make a cake for David Mullins and

Charlie Craig for their 2012 wedding reception. "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ so you can say it's a religious belief, but I believe that the bible teaches that that's not an OK thing," said Phillips.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado brought a case on the couple's behalf. The state Civil Rights Commission ruled in May 2014 that the business violated state anti-discrimination laws, ordering the bakery to change its policy. The bakery's appeal sits at the Colorado Court of Appeals.

FFRF joined Americans United for Separation of Church and State's amicus brief, written by AU Legal Director Ayesha Khan.

The order telling Phillips to stop discriminating does not violate his

rights to free speech and free exercise of religion, the brief argues. Cakes are made to order for customers, who commission them for their own enjoyment, "not because they want to assist the bakery in expressing itself."

Requiring the bakery to make cakes for gay couples doesn't force the business to proclaim its approval of gays, notes the brief. A business might serve gay people "because it wishes to increase its revenue by serving as many customers as possible, because it values same-sex marriages as much as straight couples' marriages, because it did not inquire about its customers' sexual orientations and does not consider that information relevant to its business, or because it simply wishes to follow applicable state antidiscrimination laws."

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FFRF stops many violations

Constitutional whack-a-mole engages legal staff

TurningPoint Church crosses the line

Fayette County Public Schools, Lexington, Ky., received FFRF complaints about several state/church violations.

Leestown Middle School held a "retreat" for sixth graders at two churches. Students were given T-shirts at the retreat that advertised TurningPoint Church and its website. They were told to wear shirts to a mandatory school assembly, which was supposedly secular, put on by the church's lead pastor, Joshua Mauney. He had children write down information, including their addresses, on cards. FFRF's complainant then received mail from the church.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to the school district Nov. 13. "Allowing a church leader unique access to a captive audience of schoolchildren and permitting him to turn students into walking billboards for his church is inappropriate and unconstitutional, and his predatory conduct should raise many red flags."

Markert continued, "Moreover, public school employees cannot distribute or wear religious T-shirts while at school, nor can they require or encourage students to wear them."

The district responded in February, informing FFRF that speakers would be prohibited from using students as a platform for a religious message on social media and from requesting names and addresses of students in the future. The district also agreed to request advance approval of anything put on donated items.

'Praying hands' image off school wall



After initially refusing, Kenneth Cooper Middle School officials in Oklahoma have removed a poster called "Faith in America" featuring two children with their hands clasped in prayer in front of an American flag.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel first wrote to Putnam County Schools about the image in August. "The meaning could not be more clear," Seidel wrote, "real American children pray."

School district attorney Anthony Childers responded that the district had received no complaints in the 18 years the poster had been up and

claimed it was not proselytizing. "At this time, we do not believe that the image violates the Establishment Clause and the District will not agree to remove the image from its office."

In a rebuttal, Seidel noted that the fact that the display had been up so long "only serve[d] to make the violation more egregious." The claim that the poster was not religious was "at odds with common sense," he said.

FFRF's local complainant reported that "Faith in America" has been swapped out for a George Washington portrait.

FFRF stops bible study field trip

Del Norte County Unified School District stopped a teacher at Crescent Elk Middle School, Crescent City, Calif., from holding a bible study as part of an overnight field trip to her home.

"When a school allows a teacher to lead students in a devotional bible study, the school becomes complicit in an egregious constitutional violation and breach of trust," wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in a letter sent Jan. 26.

Superintendent Don Olson responded the next day, saying that he "directed staff to stop this practice immediately," and would work with the district's legal team, thanking FFRF for making him aware it was happening.

Georgia school removes 10 Commandments

FFRF succeeded in getting a Ten Commandments display removed from the Pinevale Elementary School library in Valdosta, Ga. Staff Attorney Sam Grover in an Oct. 24 letter to Valdosta City Schools wrote, "Any student will view a Ten Commandments display in a school as being endorsed by a school."

After a follow-up letter, Superintendent E. Martin Roesch phoned Grover to say that the display had been removed.

No more Christian pumpkin patch trips

A field trip to a church-run pumpkin patch will not reoccur at Randolph Elementary in Centreville, Ala. Kindergartners and first graders were given nametags reading, "Hay there, Jesus loves you" with a bible verse underneath.

Students' finger paintings also had bible verses printed at the top. The students posed for a photo beneath two large signs with bible verses on them.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote the district Nov. 24: "It excludes non-Christian and nonreligious students for a public school to schedule a trip to this type of sectarian establishment."

On Jan. 23, the superintendent of Bibb County Schools responded that this was the school's first visit to the pumpkin patch, admitting it had not been properly vetted. She said the district would not send students there in the future.

South Dakota sex ed secularized

The public school district in Aberdeen, S.D., which showed a Catholic version of a sex education program to students, is taking steps to correct the violation after getting a Jan. 9 letter from Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

The health curriculum at Central High School included "Romance without Regret," a religious presentation promoting sexual abstinence and "chastity" from a Catholic perspective. The presenters prayed and made religious references such as "Realize that purity is a gift from Jesus, we have to ask him of it, and he'll give it to us."

It also denigrated students, particularly girls, who had had sex, describing a man who has sex with a woman as "robbing her purity" and watching pornography as "looking at the corpse of a woman's heart." It also quoted many debunked and misleading health statistics.

The superintendent called Elliott two weeks later to say that the video was shown mistakenly instead of a secular version of the presentation. She reviewed both versions of the film in full and assured FFRF that she recognized the Catholic version was inappropriate for public schools and would not be shown again.

Team chaplain barred in Florida

A Nov. 24 FFRF letter ensured the removal of a team chaplain who, with coaches, led Franklin County Schools athletes in prayer in the locker rooms, at practices and at games.

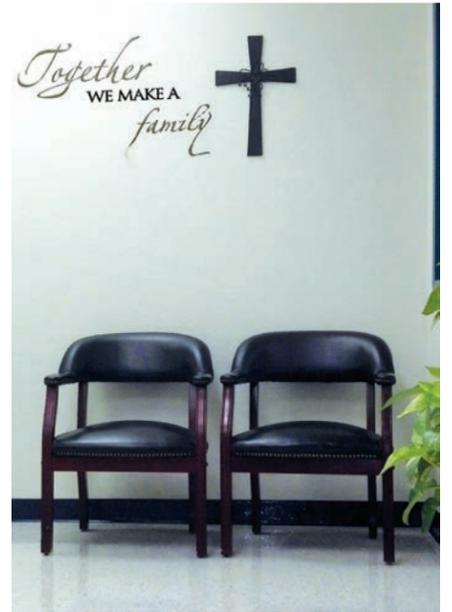
"Public high school football teams cannot appoint or employ a chaplain, seek out a spiritual leader for the team, or agree to have a volunteer team chaplain, because public schools may not advance or promote religion," wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

Superintendent Nina Marks, Eastpoint, Fla., later responded that the individual in question was employed as a statistician and film editor, not as a chaplain, and was "acting entirely on his behalf without permission or authority of the administration." He and other employees were reminded that district staff "cannot and will not participate or encourage religious activities of any kind."

God out of Okla. police training

Oklahoma's Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training (CLEET) is taking steps to eliminate unconstitutional religious training materials after receiving an FFRF complaint. A peace officer in training told FFRF that during training, instructors and materials repeatedly promoted religion.

Course materials contained statements such as, "While there are differences between the various faiths, we still are a people of God. This idea is the basis for the common bond of all people." A section focusing on ethics



Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a complaint letter Dec. 15 to Joshua, Texas, about this display in the Joshua Ninth Grade Campus building. Attorney Mike Leasor responded Feb. 25 to say that the cross had been removed and returned to its owner, a former employee.

encouraged peace officers to dedicate themselves before God to their chosen profession.

In an Oct. 7 letter, Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote, "CLEET must revise its training materials and lectures by removing suggestions that belief in God is an essential component of being a competent peace officer."

Grover corresponded with an attorney representing CLEET who said he was taking steps to remove religious content, adding that instructors were warned about expressing their personal religious views in class.

Missouri park crèche won't be back

The Higginsville, Mo., Parks and Recreation Department has in the past displayed a large nativity scene in a public park with a sign saying "The Savior is Born."

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent the department a letter after a local resident complained: "By displaying this sign, the Department is praising the Christian god and proclaiming Jesus as savior. This is in direct violation of the Constitution."

The department responded Feb. 4 that the nativity will not be put up in the future.

Letter ends Kansas bible handouts

Unified School District 219 in Kansas has stopped a Minneola Elementary School teacher from distributing bibles to students. In a letter sent Jan. 30, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel informed the district, "When a school distributes religious literature to its students, it entangles itself with that religious message."

Superintendent Mark Walker responded Feb. 6: "The district has taken prompt action to visit with the teacher and inform the entire staff that allowing the Gideons to distribute Bibles on school property is not allowed and should not happen again."

W.Va. middle school crosses removed

Ravenswood Middle School in Ripley, W.Va., has taken down crosses that were previously displayed on school property.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote



Pastor Josh Mauney posted this photo of a Kentucky middle school assembly on social media. (See story top of page 6.)

Jackson County Schools on Jan. 20 after learning that multiple crosses were placed in a garden near an entrance to the school. One included the word “FAITH” and two verses from the New Testament.

“We are sensitive to the possibility that the crosses and angels are meant as a memorial. However, it is the school’s constitutional obligation to find a religiously neutral means of expressing remembrance in a memorial display,” wrote Elliott.

The district responded Feb. 6 to say that the crosses had been removed.

FFRF stops Kansas proselytizing

Haskins Learning Center, a K-8 public school in Pratt, Kan., is presenting in-service training to teachers about religious proselytizing after FFRF again objected to the school’s practices.

Just six weeks earlier, the school had agreed to stop prayer at school events. But the day after the first response, FFRF received a report that teachers had distributed gifts to students with attached tags quoting the biblical John 3:16.

An attorney for the school told Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel on Feb. 9 that he had in-services scheduled with instructional and administrative staff.

Prayer get boot from graduation

Quehanna Boot Camp, an adult correctional facility in Karthaus, Pa., will not include prayers in future graduation ceremonies. Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote the camp Feb. 3 to object to the pastor-led prayers.

The Department of Corrections responded Feb. 13, writing that the invocation and benediction portions of the

ceremony would be removed.

Religious odyssey off school schedule

FFRF learned that Tropic Isles Elementary School, North Fort Myers, Fla., planned a fifth-grade field trip to a church which was hosting a walk-through play entitled “Drug House Odyssey.”

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote the school district on Feb. 12 informing them that the field trip was unconstitutional: “Taking public school students to a church, a place covered with religious iconography, is an endorsement of that church’s religion.”

Lee County Schools Superintendent Nancy Graham responded Feb. 16, stating that she shared FFRF’s concern that the district’s participation “not present any impression that the School District is attempting to indoctrinate students into a religious belief.”

The district chose to postpone the event and consider an alternative site, she said.

Hand soap Jesus off school bottles

Bennett Elementary School in McKinney, Texas, removed hand sanitizer bottles that displayed the Lord’s Prayer and the logo of a church. “Religion is a divisive force in public schools,” wrote Staff Attorney Sam Grover. “Though the school may accept donations from religious entities such as churches, the school still must comply with the Establishment Clause in its use of those items.”

FFRF’s complainant reported on Feb. 18 that the prayers had been removed and the church logos replaced with school logos.

Overheard

I think the only reason for religion is death. If you didn’t die, there would be no religion.

Talk show host Larry King, 81, radio interview in which he says he’s “probably an atheist”

Charisma News, 2-25-15

When someone tells me that America is a Christian nation and all the laws we need are contained in the Bible, to me that is not a religious discussion. It’s about the notion of authority this person is employing in an attempt to control others. God might be real to this person, but what is as real to me is Article VI of the Constitution.

Activist entertainer Henry Rollins, blog LA Weekly, 2-26-15

Many nonreligious parents were more coherent and passionate about their ethical principles than some of the “religious” parents in our study. The vast

majority appeared to live goal-filled lives characterized by moral direction and sense of life having a purpose.

Interview with Vern Bengston, University of Southern California gerontology and sociology professor, on a 40-year study of religion and family life called the “Longitudinal Study of Generations”

Los Angeles Times, 1-14-15

I have to keep my mouth shut when it comes to any criticism or satire about religion. If I wish to make a remark about religion or practice of religion regarding my own beliefs, I keep it to myself.

Egyptian atheist Amr Mohammed, interview

USA Today, 2-1-15 Do they stop with one man and one woman or one woman and one woman? Or do they go to multiple marriages? Or do they go to marriages between men and their daughters or women and their sons?

Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice

FFRF ousts teachers from ‘Kids for Christ’ clubs

College Oaks Elementary School in Lake Charles, La., and High Mount School in Swansea, Ill., have both barred teachers from leading bible clubs for students after getting FFRF complaints.

FFRF wrote to Calcasieu Parish Public Schools on Jan. 9 after a concerned parent reported that College Oaks Elementary was recruiting students for the bible club Kids for Christ. All the club’s logistics were handled by College Oaks teacher Kristen Shepherd, who encouraged other staff to announce club meetings in their classrooms, according to public email records obtained by FFRF.

Reminders about Kids for Christ meetings were sent home with students, and one teacher directly called a parent to ask permission for a student to attend the club. The school also sold children’s bibles and T-shirts reading, “We are Christians at College Oaks.” Shepherd distributed bibles to students, as well as order forms for Kids for Christ merchandise.

“Given the high level of faculty involvement in the organization and content of the Kids for Christ bible club, plus the location of the meetings and regular faculty promotion of the club, a reasonable student or parent will perceive this religious

club as ‘stamped with her school’s seal of approval,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover.

Calcasieu Parish Schools’ attorney Gregory Balfour responded Jan. 26, assuring FFRF that staff were told not to hand out bibles, wear bible club T-shirts at school or be involved in promoting or leading the club. “School staff were also reminded that they may not ‘pressure’ students to join the club,” he said.

In a similar situation in Illinois’ High Mount School District 116, the district sent emails to K-8 students and their parents at High Mount School to promote a new Kids for Christ group. The district email described the club as “a permanent program” that “operates in cooperation with local schools.”

In a Feb. 4 letter to school attorney William Stiehl Jr., Grover wrote: “All HMS staff should be reminded that their duties under the Establishment Clause prohibit them from actively promoting a religious club while acting in their official capacities as district employees.”

Stiehl responded the next day: “The employee who sent the emails has been advised that emails which appear to promote or sponsor a religious organization may not be sent using the High Mount email system or on High Mount letterhead.”

Prayerful posts off Ohio school site

Eastern Local School District, Reedsville, Ohio, removed two religious posts after a car accident claimed the life of a former Eastern High School student. The posts called for “prayer warriors” to “lift all of [those involved in the accident] up in prayer.”

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote Superintendent Michele Filon a letter on Feb. 12. “We are sensitive to the fact that sharing such tragic news can be a difficult and emotional task. Expressing condolences over this situation was correct, but we wish to remind the District that it must ensure that it remains neutral on matters of religion.” FFRF received word Feb. 19

that the posts had been removed.

FFRF protects Minn. prisoners’ rights

The Minnesota Correctional Facility in St. Cloud has agreed to discontinue providing extra gifts to prisoners who attend holiday Christian services.

“Encouraging inmates to attend a church service is constitutionally impermissible because it coerces inmates to participate in a religious exercise, and sends the message that MCF-St. Cloud endorses Christianity over all other faiths and over nonreligion,” wrote Staff Attorney Sam Grover on Feb. 12.

Warden Collin Gau responded Feb. 23. “We had no intention of sending a message that MCF-St. Cloud endorses Christianity over other religion, and to avoid that effective immediately, we will discontinue providing any gifts to offenders as a part of attending any religious programming at MCF-St. Cloud.”

Hotel bibles removed at Portland State

FFRF had been trying to obtain a response from Portland State University in Oregon about its hotel bibles since its original letter of complaint in February 2014. “If guests want to read this religious text during their stay, they should do what everyone else does, travel with the book they want to read. The state need not, and cannot, provide religious literature to citizens,” said Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

With help from FFRF’s Portland chapter and the PSU Secular Student Alliance, FFRF was able to confirm that the bibles had been removed from rooms, despite the university’s unwillingness to admit it had taken action.

— Compiled by Maddy Ziegler

Roy Moore, who told probate judges issuing marriage licenses not to comply with a federal court decision striking down the state’s gay marriage ban
“Good Morning America,” 2-10-15

You’re going to be able to marry your dog. You’re going to be able to marry your cat. Ain’t we going crazy in this world, ya’ll?

Christian evangelist Cedric Hatcher, protesting gay marriage in Birmingham, Ala.
al.com, 2-10-15

One supporter writes: “I am sending 15 bras – I have prayed for anyone that will touch these bras – that they will know love, freedom, happiness and most of all Jesus Christ.”

Comment shared by David Terpstra, former pastor at Next Level Church in Englewood, Colo., founder of “Free the Girls,” which collects donated bras in the U.S. that are sold to women in Mozambique
Religion News Service, 2-10-15

FFRF 2014 convention speech

Town of Greece prayer plaintiff not ready to say 'amen'

This award presentation and speech was given on October 25, 2015, at FFRF's 37th annual national convention at the Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles.

ANNIE LAURIE GAYLOR [Naming Linda Stephens and Susan Galloway as FFRF's Freethinkers of the Year for contesting government prayer in Greece, N.Y.]:

Susan Galloway is a graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who has worked mostly in long-term care, including helping people with Alzheimer's. She's a social justice activist and first advocated for separation between church and state when as a fifth grader she refused to sing in her school's Christmas concert.

By Susan Galloway

Thank you for this award and the amazing greeting. I've never been in a room with so many people who believe in the separation of church and state and are willing to fight for it.

I started attending town meetings during this particular time over the issue of a public cable access channel. I continued to go to the meetings to fight for public cable access and its continuation and noticed a pattern, a pattern of prayers, which were all quite sectarian and all Christian and made me feel uncomfortable. It made me feel like I didn't belong in a town where I should have. Government should feel inclusive, and it sure didn't feel that way to me.

As I was looking at this podium, I was imagining the fact that this was how it was at the town board meeting. Instead of "Freedom from Religion," it had the big seal of the town of Greece and the pastors behind it. I'd be out there with you and they'd be saying their prayer, talking to Jesus and all the other trinities, depending on the pastor. They'd be asking for wisdom and for the ability to make good decisions.

It's hard to believe that the Supreme Court would have thought that the prayer was directed at the board members, when they would have been behind here. I'd be in the audience and [the board members] would be crossing themselves, and it was very uncomfortable and very inappropriate. I said, "This is not OK."

Linda and I, who had known each other through other activist work, said, "Let's do something about it." I'd hoped that we could solve it by talking to them reasonably. We would reason, "Hey, this is uncomfortable, this is wrong," but it didn't happen that way. We ended up filing a lawsuit.

As it turned out, an ordinary person who spoke up had an extraordinary thing happen to them. It went through the courts and wound up at the U.S.

Supreme Court. We had lost in the district court and discussed whether we want to appeal it, because we knew it would go up to the Supreme Court. If we won they would appeal it up to the Supreme Court, but at that time we didn't think it was likely that it would be accepted.

So we appealed and won in the appellate court. As it turned out, there were other cases that were pending in other appeals courts throughout the country. With the timing of their decisions, the courts were split, so the Supreme Court decided to take our case.

If you're not familiar with our brief, we had videos of almost 12 years of prayers. There was no denying what had happened, no denying how it had looked, how they stood up, everything. So it really came down to our argument that it violated the First Amendment because the town of Greece aligned itself with religion.

Unfortunately, the court decided 5-4 that it was tradition and that was what was right. I do think it was very interesting that the three justices of a minority religion all dissented. I think that was a positive outcome.

The town's new policy is really a bait and switch.

Since the decision

I want to tell you what's happened since. On Aug. 19, the town adopted a new invocation policy, which was almost identical to the Alliance Defending Freedom's model policy. The Alliance represented the town in the lawsuit.

I went to the town board meeting and saw on the agenda that they were going to vote on the policy. I asked them for a copy, but they said they didn't have one, so I had no idea what



Susan Galloway (Photo by Ingrid Laas)

was in it. They basically voted on it with no discussion and it passed.

The next day I got the policy and read it. It basically contradicted everything the town told the Supreme Court — that anybody was welcome to do the prayer, that they didn't discriminate, that there were no restrictions. But the new policy required a representative from a group with a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

In the 12 years of videotapes and prayers that we had, there were only three token prayer givers. That was right about the time we were filing the lawsuit and right after. It was obvious they did it because they wanted to have the evidence that they were allowing anybody to do it.

The new policy will totally eliminate the ability of two of the three people from ever doing the prayer again. It really was a bait and switch. They said, "This is what we do," and after the cameras and media attention were gone, they approved this terrible policy. I continue to fight it.

I stood up in September and complained about the policy and the way it was handled in putting it out there. The supervisor made a very insulting response when I was leaving. He said, "The hypocrisy. We won the lawsuit and we are allowing atheists to come pray because they want us to be tolerant, but they're not tolerant of Christians. The hypocrisy."

To say that a town is merely allowing atheists, when they say they don't discriminate and anybody's welcome, it all made me incredibly angry. So I responded and he told me that if I wasn't quiet he'd remove me.

It was just this pompousness, that they have the right to do this and to hell with what anybody else believes and what is right. They were going to do what they wanted to do.

I can't emphasize the importance of separation of church and state enough. I think the general public doesn't understand it. They think, "What's the big deal? Just don't listen. Think

about something else."

It is a big deal when you are made to feel like a second-class citizen at a government meeting when you are supposed to be part of that community and when they ask people to stand, you don't stand.

If you make a request like, "Please don't get rid of our public cable access" — is that [not standing for prayer] going to affect how they vote and how they respond to me? I can't believe that's not going to have an effect. When the justices say that adults can't be coerced — need I say more?

Look at how many people do things based on peer pressure, because others are doing it. They just want to belong. It happens.

I swear we had a great case, but we had a lousy court [applause]. I think a future case will come and this terrible decision will be overturned. I hope it's within my lifetime, because we can't wait.

I want to thank you again because I felt alone so many times. I'm thankful that Linda and I went through this together.

I didn't feel much support then, but now it's so wonderful to see so many people who feel this way. Sometimes it gets really lonely and you feel like you're fighting a battle by yourself. I'm so glad and thankful that you appreciate this. Thank you so much for this honor.

'I swear we had a great case, but we had a lousy court.'

Linda Stephens' acceptance speech appeared in the December 2014 issue, and is available online at:

ffrf.org/publications/freethought-today

They Said What?

This power over marriage, which came from God under our organic law, is not to be redefined by the United States Supreme Court or any federal court. **Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore** "Fox News Sunday," 2-15-15

They are comforted by the fact that they know their child is in heaven. If I want to let my child be with God, why is that wrong?

Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa, opposing a bill limiting a parental faith-healing exemption in Idaho's child neglect law

The Raw Story, 2-24-15

By saying everyone can go report [abuse] could encourage even real victims to exaggerate, and that's not good. My opinion is the less the media is involved, the better it is to protect the victims.

Australian Rabbi Yosef Felman, testifying in Melbourne before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

The Guardian, 2-5-15



Linda Stephens and Susan Galloway received FFRF's "Freethinker of the Year" award for their courageous challenge of prayers at city hall. (Photo by Ingrid Laas)

How secular family values stack up

This op-ed was originally published Jan. 14 in the Los Angeles Times and is reprinted with the author's permission.

By Phil Zuckerman

More children are “growing up godless” than at any other time in our nation’s history. They are the offspring of an expanding secular population that includes a relatively new and burgeoning category of Americans called the “Nones,” so nicknamed because they identified themselves as believing in “nothing in particular” in a 2012 study by the Pew Research Center.

The number of American children raised without religion has grown significantly since the 1950s, when fewer than 4% of Americans reported growing up in a nonreligious household, according to several recent national studies. That figure entered the double digits when a 2012 study showed that 11% of people born after 1970 said they had been raised in secular homes. This may help explain why 23% of adults in the U.S. claim to have no religion, and more than 30% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 say the same.

So how does the raising of upstanding, moral children work without prayers at mealtimes and morality lessons at Sunday school? Quite well, it seems.

Far from being dysfunctional, nihilistic and rudderless without the security and rectitude of religion, secular households provide a sound and solid foundation for children, according to Vern Bengston, a USC professor of gerontology and sociology.

For nearly 40 years, Bengston has overseen the Longitudinal Study of Generations, which has become the largest study of religion and family life conducted across several generational cohorts in the United States. When

Bengston noticed the growth of non-religious Americans becoming increasingly pronounced, he decided in 2013 to add secular families to his study in an attempt to understand how family life and intergenerational influences play out among the religionless.

He was surprised by what he found: High levels of family solidarity and emotional closeness between parents and nonreligious youth, and strong ethical standards and moral values that had been clearly articulated as they were imparted to the next generation.

“Many nonreligious parents were more coherent and passionate about their ethical principles than some of the ‘religious’ parents in our study,” Bengston told me. “The vast majority appeared to live goal-filled lives characterized by moral direction and sense of life having a purpose.”

Nonreligious family life is replete with its own sustaining moral values and enriching ethical precepts.

My own ongoing research among secular Americans — as well as that of a handful of other social scientists who have only recently turned their gaze on secular culture — confirms that non-religious family life is replete with its own sustaining moral values and enriching ethical precepts. Chief among those: rational problem solving, personal autonomy, independence of thought, avoidance of corporal punishment, a spirit of “questioning everything” and, far above all, empathy.

For secular people, morality is predicated on one simple principle: empathetic reciprocity, widely known as the Golden Rule. Treating other people as you would like to be treated. It is an ancient, universal ethical imperative. And it requires no supernatural beliefs. As one atheist mom who wanted to be identified only as Debbie told me: “The way we teach them what is right and what is wrong is by trying to instill a sense of empathy . . . how other people feel. You know, just trying to give them that sense of what it’s like to be on the other end of their actions. And I don’t see any need for God in that.”

“If your morality is all tied in with God,” she continued, “what if you at some point start to question the existence of God? Does that mean your moral sense suddenly crumbles? The way we are teaching our children . . . no matter what they choose to believe later in life, even if they become religious or whatever, they are still going to have that system.”

The results of such secular child-rearing are encouraging. Studies have found that secular teenagers are far less likely to care what the “cool kids” think, or express a need to fit in with them, than their religious peers. When these teens mature into “godless” adults, they exhibit less racism than their religious counterparts, according to a 2010 Duke University study. Many psychological studies show that secular grownups tend to be less vengeful, less nationalistic, less militaristic, less authoritarian and more tolerant, on average, than religious adults.

Recent research also has shown that children raised without religion tend to remain irreligious as they grow older, and are perhaps more accepting. Secular adults are more likely to understand and accept the science concerning global warming and to support women’s equality and gay rights. One telling fact from the criminology field: Atheists were almost absent



Phil Zuckerman

from our prison population as of the late 1990s, comprising less than half of 1% of those behind bars, according to Federal Bureau of Prisons statistics. This echoes what the criminology field has documented for more than a century — the unaffiliated and the non-religious engage in far fewer crimes.

Another meaningful related fact: Democratic countries with the lowest levels of religious faith and participation today — such as Sweden, Denmark, Japan, Belgium and New Zealand — have among the lowest violent crime rates in the world and enjoy remarkably high levels of societal well-being. If secular people couldn’t raise well-functioning, moral children, then a preponderance of them in a given society would spell societal disaster. Yet quite the opposite is the case.

Being a secular parent and something of an expert on secular culture, I know well the angst many secular Americans experience when they can’t help but wonder: Could I possibly be making a mistake by raising my children without religion? The unequivocal answer is no. Children raised without religion have no shortage of positive traits and virtues, and they ought to be warmly welcomed as a growing American demographic.

*Phil Zuckerman is a professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College and author of **Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions**.*

\$25,000 spent on Orlando police chaplains

In the last two years, the Orlando (Fla.) Police Department spent about \$25,000 on its police chaplain program.

The department spent over \$15,000 on a new Ford Focus for chaplain use and nearly \$1,400 on a vinyl “Orlando Police Chaplain” wrap for the car (pictured), according to records received in response to FFRF’s open records request.

Expenditures in just two years included hundreds of dollars on uniforms for chaplains, \$1,000 in dues to the International Conference of Police Chaplains (ICPC), and another \$1,000 for food, lodging, travel and other costs for one chaplain to attend an ICPC conference.

An “appreciation” dinner for chaplains in 2012 ran \$318, including costs for six \$6 bottles of Evian. A “Chaplain’s Corp Wives Appreciation Dinner” in 2013 cost \$655.

FFRF’s request, submitted in November 2014, asked for records going back two years as well as records of



The department spent \$15,000 on a new Ford Focus plus \$1,400 for a vinyl “Orlando Police Chaplain” wrap.

chaplain vehicle purchases from any time. The OPD also spent \$13,000 on a chaplain car in 1998.

The chaplains appear to be all Christian pastors. FFRF also learned that

chaplains are directly paid a monthly stipend of \$150. One chaplain is on paid duty per month.

Also significant are the records FFRF did not receive: no training ma-

terials, guidance documents, regulations or other policies for chaplains were provided.

Either the department did not fully comply the request, in violation of the Florida Sunshine Law, or the chaplain program has no formal regulation of or training for chaplains. FFRF is following up on those matters.

“It’s appalling that taxpayers are footing this bill,” said FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, who is investigating the church/state entanglement after receiving local complaints. “Surely that money could be better spent, perhaps organizing actual qualified counselors for OPD employees.”

Seidel noted the Florida Constitution provides that no government revenue can be taken from the public treasury “directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.”

FFRF, which has more than 1,000 Florida members, is considering its legal options.

More than \$23,000 in scholarships

FFRF announces trio of student essay contests

FFRF announces its 2015 high school, college and graduate/mature student essay scholarship competitions, which offer more than \$23,000 in total cash prizes.

FFRF offered its first student competition in 1979 and added a separate contest for college-bound high school seniors in 1994 and one geared to graduate/"older" students (ages 25-30) in 2010.

The awards are \$3,000 first place, \$2,000 second place, \$1,000 third place, \$750 fourth place, \$500 fifth place and \$400 for sixth place. Several \$200 "honorable mentions" may be awarded at judges' discretion.

A bonus of \$50 from FFRF members Dean and Dorea Schramm will be given to any winner who is also a member of a secular student club (or who joins Secular Student Alliance online, which is free).

Thousands of scholarship programs reward students for blind faith and orthodoxy, but hardly any reward students for using reason. Please publicize FFRF's important outreach to the next generation at your local high schools, colleges and universities, and to the students in your life.

William J. Schulz High School Senior Essay Competition

"Why I'm Good Without God: Challenges of being a young nonbeliever" or **"Young, bold and nonbelieving: Challenges of being a nonbeliever of color"**

Choose one of the topics below:

Atheist/nonbeliever of color: Write from personal perspective about experiences or challenges you face, as a nonbeliever in a religious family or community, and minority within the freethought community. Are there obstacles discouraging diversity within the movement? What do you think could be done to make freethought and nonbelief more attractive to America's nonwhite communities? Include at least one paragraph about why you are a nonbeliever.

Why I'm good without God: Write from personal perspective about your experiences or challenges in the face of persistent stereotypes that atheists and other nonbelievers are not moral. Explain how you're "good without God," why religion is not necessary for morality and may even be counterproductive. What can be done by you or others to counter negative stereotypes about nonbelievers? Include at least one paragraph about why you are a nonbeliever.

Eligibility: North American high school senior who graduates in spring 2015, going on to college in fall 2015.

Word length: 500 to 700 words.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay to be postmarked no later than June 1 to highschoolessay@ffrf.org with subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay (Your Name Here). Follow other requirements listed at end of this article.

This competition is endowed by William J. Schultz, a member of FFRF who died at 57, was a farm boy who became a chemical

engineer and built paper-producing mills around the world, and cared deeply about FFRF's purposes.

Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Competition

"Proud to be an atheist: Challenging stigmas against nonbelievers"

Topic: Atheists are one of the most despised minorities, yet statistically are among the most moral segments in the U.S. population. Write a persuasive essay about why nonbelievers should be respected, not stigmatized. Include personal perspective or experiences with religious family, schoolmates or community. Provide supporting arguments (e.g., recent studies, philosophical or historic perspectives) about how freethinkers contribute to society despite widespread vilification. Include at least one paragraph about why you are a nonbeliever.

Word length: 700 to 900 words

Eligibility: Currently enrolled undergraduate college student through age 24, including but not limited to college seniors graduating in spring/summer 2015, attending North American college or university.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your essay to be postmarked no later than June 15 to collegeessay@ffrf.org with subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay (Your Name Here). Follow other requirements listed at the end of article. Click here to view a printable PDF.

The late Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor, was an FFRF officer and active atheist known by generations of University of Wisconsin-Madison students for fine-tuning their reasoning abilities.

Brian Bolton Graduate/"Older" Student Essay Competition

"Religion and violence: What is to blame for religious terrorism?"

Topic: Write a persuasive analysis dissecting the common claim that religion cannot be held responsible for violence in its name. For example, President Obama has said of the Islamic State: "They are not religious leaders, they are terrorists. No religion is responsible for terrorism. People are responsible for violence and terrorism." He also said "no god condones the killing of innocents." Analyze the claim that it's only a handful of extremists who are "perverting" religion who are to blame for the violence, and not religion itself. Provide supporting arguments to back up your position (religious pronouncements such as biblical or Quranic verses, historic or contemporary violence, underlying factors, etc.). Are there solutions to religious terrorism?

Eligibility: Currently enrolled graduate student including up to age 30, or undergrads ages 25-30, attending North American college or university, including but not limited to someone graduating or earning degree in spring or summer 2015.

Word limit: 750 to 950 words.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Email your

essay to be postmarked no later than July 1 to gradessay@ffrf.org with subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay (Your Name Here). Follow other requirements listed at the end. Click here to view a printable PDF.

The competition is generously endowed by Brian Bolton, a Lifetime Member who is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas.

Rules applying to all contests

Submit essay both by mail and email by postmark deadline. No faxes. Essay must be typed, double-spaced, standard margins and stapled. Include word count. Place name and essay title on each page. Choose own title. Attach one-paragraph biography on separate page at end of essay including name, age and birth date, hometown, university or college, year in school, major or intended major, degree being earned and interests. (High school students should include high school's name, city, state and date of graduation as well as intended college.) Do not include a résumé.

For chance at additional \$50 bonus, indicate the name of the secular school

or college club you belong to or join Secular Student Alliance (free at secularstudents.org/studentmember and mention it in bio). Provide both summer and fall 2015 addresses (campus and home), phone numbers and email addresses for notification. Winners may be asked to send verification of student enrollment.

Students will be disqualified if they do not follow instructions. FFRF monitors for plagiarism. Do not write under or over word minimums and maximums. By entering, students agree to permit winning essays to be printed in full or in part in Freethought Today, FFRF's newspaper, and posted online at FFRF's website. Winners agree to promptly provide a photograph suitable for reproduction with their essay and will not receive their prize until they do so. Winners will receive a school-year subscription to Freethought Today. All eligible entrants will be offered a subscription to Freethought Today or a freethought book or product.

Email essay as indicated above; also mail by required deadline to:

FFRF
____ Essay Contest
PO Box 750
Madison WI 53701

FFRF in Reddit's top 10, to receive \$83K

FFRF was chosen from more than 8,000 charities to be in Reddit's top 10 and receive an \$82,766 donation. Reddit, a social networking and news website, decided to donate 10% of its 2014 gross ad revenue to 10 charities selected by users. Over 80,000 users voted.

Reddit partnered with Charity Navigator, a nonprofit that evaluates charities, to vet potential awardees. (Charity Navigator rates FFRF an "exceptional" 97.06 out of 100 with four out of four stars.)

Others in the top 10 receiving a similar donation were the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Doctors Without Borders USA, Erowid Center, Wikimedia Foundation, Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedel-

ic Studies, National Public Radio, Free Software Foundation and Tor Project Inc.

"We're so pleased to be in such illustrious company," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "FFRF strives to do for the secular movement what charities like Planned Parenthood, Doctors Without Borders and NPR do for their respective fields. We're honored that Redditors recognize our contribution."

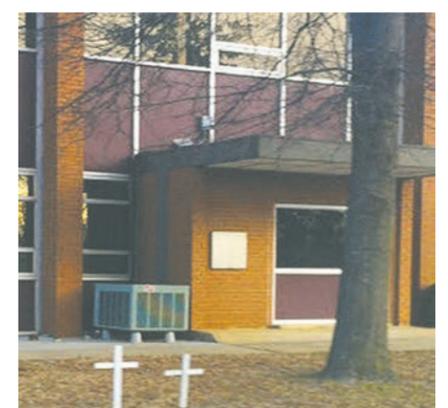
"The Internet is one of the few places some atheists feel comfortable being open about their atheism," said Co-President Dan Barker. "This award is an honor, but also a symbol that secularism is gaining strength and acceptance wherever ideas can be freely exchanged."



Hypocrisy in Searcy?

Police Chief Jeremy Clark suddenly resigned his position in Searcy, Ark., after a federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms task force searched his home March 3. FFRF had complained several times, starting in 2013, to Clark and other officials about Latin crosses in front of the city building pictured above, but he refused to remove them after first claiming none were ever there. Clark said at the time, "Christianity is part of our police department."

According to KTHV News, a residence owned by Clark is part of an arson investigation. Authorities are also looking at possible violations of



firearms and controlled substance laws and an allegation of abuse of power.

FFRF to Wis. Legislature: End school vouchers

FFRF is urging the Wisconsin Legislature's powerful Joint Committee on Finance to investigate rampant school voucher fraud and to end the disastrous voucher experiment altogether.

In a Feb. 16 letter from Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott providing detailed analysis to legislators, FFRF noted that in the recently expanded voucher system, 100% of the state-funded schools are Christian and 73% of students attend Catholic schools.

Gov. Scott Walker's budget proposal would lift the 1,000-student cap on vouchers, opening the floodgates to funding religious schools with public dollars.



Patrick Elliott

The letter highlights reports of significant fraud in the Milwaukee voucher program, noting that more than \$139 million in the last 10 years has gone to schools that were subsequently barred from the program. Some schools, like Washington Du Bois Christian Leadership Academy, shut down abruptly amid claims of fraud, leaving families scrambling. Elliott said the Milwaukee program "serves as a warning as to what happens when taxpayer money is given to private, mostly religious groups that

are not answerable to taxpayers."

"It matters what is taught in taxpayer-funded schools," Elliott said. Some voucher schools utilize fundamentalist textbooks that promote unscientific claims and revisionist history, and teach secular subjects with a biblical view of "absolute truth."

While public schools are governed by publicly elected school boards and are subject to open meetings and records laws, taxpayers have no means to monitor the voucher schools that they fund.

Elliott urged legislators to investigate the many significant problems with the current system: "As it stands today, reports of fraud are unconfirmed because, reprehensibly, the state has never conducted a comprehensive investigation. Current and former voucher school employees have rung the alarm bell but the state has ignored the overwhelming evidence of mismanagement, defrauding of taxpayers, and a deficient education provided to vulnerable students."

Elliott also charged that Walker's proposal violates the provision in the state constitution barring funding of religion.

"Voucher schools were sold as an experiment to 'save' students from failing public schools," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The

politicians aren't even pretending that is the case anymore. This is a brazen attack on public education."

In Madison, more than 12,500 students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, which means they would be eligible for vouchers under Walker's budget bill. Almost half of students in the Madison Metropolitan School District could leave it at public expense, Elliott wrote. "How can our public school system continue to operate if untold

numbers of students could leave for religious education, taking corresponding state funding with them?"

"The state should provide a sectarian-free public education system and end its alarming experiment to allow church-run schools to siphon taxpayer funds. Please remove all funding of voucher schools from the state budget," he concluded.

About 1,300 of FFRF's 21,500 members live in Wisconsin.

State/church success moves from Hawaii to Michigan



The city of Grand Haven and the Rotary Club recruited students from Grand Haven High School, a public school, to put up and take down the nativity scene.

Mitch Kahle and Holly Huber, FFRF Lifetime Members, have made several notches in their state/church separation belts since moving home to Michigan 16 months ago from Hawaii, where they had lived since 1992 and founded Hawaii Citizens for the Separation of State and Church. HCSSC was involved in dozens of high-profile controversies there.

Their new group is the Michigan Association of Civil Rights Activists. Mitch provided a rundown of recent activism successes:

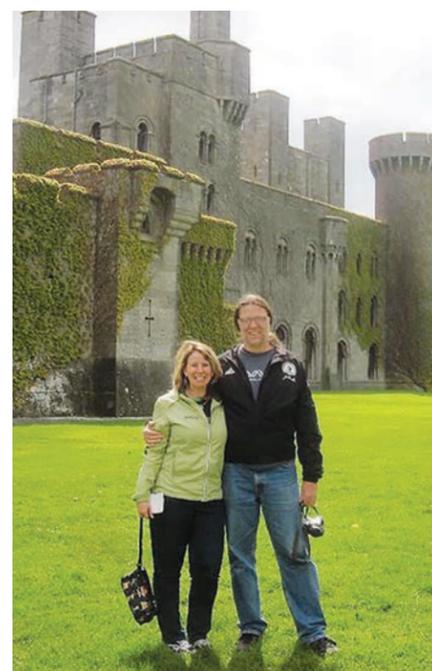
- We forced the city of Grand Haven to remove a 50-foot steel cross and a huge annual nativity scene from Dewey Hill. Both the cross and nativity had been in place on public property during Christmas since the 1960s.
- We also forced two public school districts, Fruitport and Grand Haven, to evict a pastor-led bible club ("Free-water") that was operating during lunch hour.
- MACRA also forced Ottawa County to remove a sign promoting biblical scripture from Hager Park in Jenison.
- Most recently, MACRA forced Hudsonville Public Schools to evict Bible Club Ministries International from three public schools.

"We have been contacted by more parents and are currently researching other Michigan schools where illegal and unconstitutional religious activity is reportedly taking place on campus while school is in session," Kahle said.

The Center for Inquiry-Michigan invited Huber to speak March 11 at the

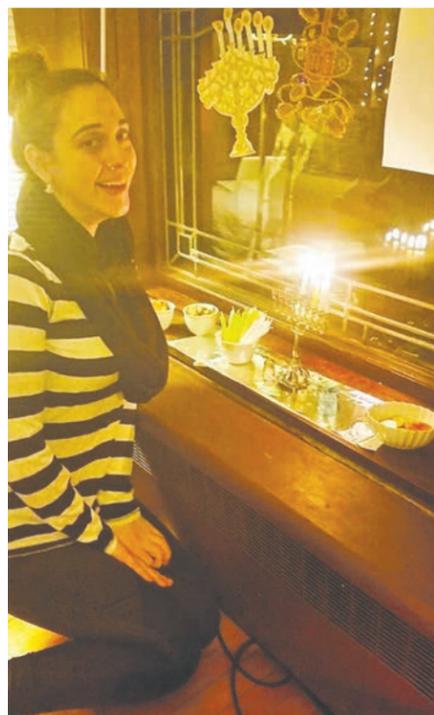
Women's City Club in Grand Rapids on MACRA's work.

Kahle was FFRF's 2011 Freethinker of the Year for convincing the Hawaii Senate to drop prayers to open legislative sessions. He and a colleague successfully sued state officials for assaulting them in the Senate during their peaceful protest.



Holly Huber and Mitch Kahle celebrated 26 years of unwedded bliss together in February with a trip overseas, here in Wales. "We'd get married if the government did not use the institution as a means to discriminate against gays and lesbians," Kahle says.

Meet a legal intern



"Amazing latkes," says Kristin Martin about her very first Hanukkah Party/Candle Lighting Ceremony last December.

Name: Kristin L. Martin.

I was born: On a lazy Sunday afternoon in July.

Family: I have two parents and an older sister.

Education: I'm currently a law student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I received a bachelor of fine arts in painting from UW-Superior. (Go Yellowjackets!)

My religious upbringing was: On paper I was raised Methodist, but my Maronite mother made sure we got to Greek Orthodox services now and then. This was just as confusing as it sounds.

How I came to work as an FFRF legal intern: I'd been aware of the FFRF for a few years but didn't know they accepted legal interns until I joined the Secular Law Students Society at the UW Law School.

What I do here: I write letters that aim to stop Establishment Clause violations.

What I like best about it: I'm learning so much about the landmark cases that have shaped the way the Establishment Clause is interpreted and enforced. I'd say the best part is gaining an understanding of the specifics of the law.

My legal interests are: I'm interested in modern constitutional issues like privacy in electronic communications and GPS data, the role of atheists in American society and finding an appropriate balance between state and federal powers.

My legal heroes are: I've met some amazing women on the UW Law School faculty who have not only motivated me, but inspired my curiosity.

These three words sum me up: I could probably just be summed up by two words: "What's next?"

Things I like: Painting, my rescue greyhound Zero, old globes.

Things I smite: Windows 8, air travel, horror movies.

Birthday bash is debut event in Charlie Brooks Auditorium
Great Friday the 13th for FFRF founder Gaylor



FFRF President Emerita and principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor, flanked by her twins, Ian, a Lifetime Member, and Annie Laurie Gaylor, current FFRF co-president.



Anne greets Phyllis Rose, Lifetime Member and longtime volunteer.



An auspicious date for FFRF to inaugurate its new auditorium in downtown Madison, Wis.



A scrumptious spread was part of the celebration Feb. 13 for Anne Gaylor's 88th birthday (along with some merriment in honor of Darwin's 206th on Feb. 12 and Valentine's Day). The celebration was a bit belated since the auditorium was not completed by her actual birthday Nov. 25.

Photography by Andrew Seidel



Applauding Anne are FFRF member Jeff Glover and Lifetime Members Karolina and Alfred Johnson.



A full house in the new Charlie Brooks Auditorium, which seats up to 90. That's Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor and many area FFRF members.



Greeting visitors in the nearly finished Anne Nicol Gaylor Lobby in the new Freethought Hall addition are (left) FFRF Assistant Charlotte Stein, Director of Operations Lisa Strand, Communications Coordinator Lauryn Seering, Bookkeeper Katie Daniel and Editorial Assistant Dayna Long. Those gorgeous orchids for Anne came from Richard Bolton and Dennis Coyier.



The opening event was a benefit for the Women's Medical Fund, believed to be the oldest, continuously operating abortion rights charity in the country, which Anne has run as a volunteer for more than 30 years. That's Co-President Dan Barker and Bookkeeper Katie Daniel collecting donations. Who says atheists don't start charities?

Tax-deductible donations to the Women's Medical Fund in Anne's honor can be sent to PO Box 248, Madison WI 53701.



The program was a brief concert performed by Dan Barker on the new Diane Uhl concert Steinway piano, of Anne's favorite songs (coincidentally nearly all by freethinkers).



Anne with longtime member and "unabashed atheist" Connie Threinen, a well-known Wisconsin feminist and the great-grand niece of Margaret Fuller.



Former priest Tom Reed, a longtime FFRF member, getting Anne's autograph of a rare copy of her 1975 book, *Abortion Is a Blessing*, the book talkshow host Phil Donahue refused to introduce her as author of on national TV in the late 1970s, until she called him on it.



Youth contingent: Calli Miller (left), FFRF's new legal assistant and former intern, with members of AHA! (Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics, a University of Wisconsin-Madison club): Margaret Babe, FFRF former interns Sam Erickson and Sarah Eucalano, with AHA! founder Chris Calvey.



Richard Bolton, who is handling several lawsuits for FFRF, with his wife, Sandra Tarver, also an attorney, and Dan Barker. (FFRF attorney Sam Grover is in the background.)



Steve Salemsen, FFRF treasurer and volunteer, with Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.



Delightful dimples from FFRF Staff Attorneys Liz Cavell (left) and Rebecca Markert.



Appropriate for Valentine's Day, Dan Barker performed this song written more than a century ago by Anne Gaylor's mother Lucie Sowle.



Anne shaking hands with Dan after the concert.

FFRF complaint letters spread from sea to shining sea

Highlights of FFRF's legal complaint letters in February 2015:

Contact: Mayor of Slidell, La.

Violation: The mayor hosted a religious community breakfast with the theme "A Call for Prayer and Unity." At least eight different speakers delivered prayers.

Contact: St. Tammany Parish Public Schools, Covington, La.

Violation: At the religious Slidell community prayer breakfast mentioned above, which took place during the school day, the Clearwood Junior High School band performed, the Slidell High School JROTC presented the colors, and Salmen High School Assistant Principal Raymond Morris spoke.

Contact: Town of Oyster Bay, N.Y.

Violation: A nativity scene was maintained on a public park lawn.

Contact: Volusia County School District, DeLand, Fla.

Violation: Spruce Creek High School rents space to Thrive Community Church, allowing the church to park a large trailer with an ad for the church service in the school parking lot all week.

Contact: Borough of Bergenfield, N.J.

Violation: The borough displayed a crèche and a menorah in Borough Hall.

Contact: Benton School Board, Ark.

Violation: The district was considering adopting a bible class that presents the bible from a sectarian and biased perspective.

Contact: Tennessee Senate

Violation: The Senate opens its sessions with prayer.

Contact: West Central School Corp., Francesville, Ind.

Violation: A West Central High School teacher showed her class the evangelical Christian movie "Fireproof," and a plaque near the school office displays the Ten Commandments.

Contact: Jones County School District, Ellisville, Miss.

Violation: Northeast Jones High School refused to let a secular student group form.

Contact: Tiffin City Schools, Ohio

Violation: A Columbian High School teacher was promoting a Christian club for which she was the adviser.

Contact: New Hampton School Board, Iowa

Violation: New Hampton High School's choir holds an annual "church tour," performing at several area churches. In addition, the choir often performs "In This Very Room," which includes the refrain, "For Jesus, Lord Jesus, is in this very room."

Contact: Michigan State Police

Violation: The police appoint volunteer chaplains, giving them the honorary rank of captain, which "afford[s] all the courtesies of that position." Chaplains are reimbursed for on-duty expenses.

Contact: New Mexico Department of Public Safety, New Mexico State Police

Violation: The DPS appointed a person with secular counseling qualifications to the position of chaplain.

Contact: City of DeLand, Fla.

Violation: DeLand's city seal depicts

a cross.

Contact: Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center, Clarksburg, W.Va.

Violation: The center displayed a religious sign.

Contact: Ankeny Community School District, Iowa

Violation: Ankeny High School's football coach prayed with players.

Contact: Independent School District 318, Grand Rapids, Minn.

Violation: A teacher at Robert J. Elington Middle School holds "Prayer Time" in his classroom every Monday morning and posted a flier for the event in the school hallway.

Contact: City of Holts Summit, Mo.

Violation: The Board of Aldermen proposed a veterans monument that would include an engraved bible quote.

Contact: Fountain Lake School District, Hot Springs, Ark.

Violation: Fountain Lake High School uses an Internet content filter that censors websites with information about minority religions.

Contact: Kentucky School District, Fort Knox, Ky.

Violation: Track coaches at Fort Campbell High School conclude practice by leading the team in prayer while the students are instructed to hold hands and bow their heads. Football coaches organize and lead prayer, regularly selecting a student at random to lead it.

Contact: Deer Valley Unified School District, Phoenix

Violation: Sierra Verde Elementary School planned a fifth-grade field trip to the Phoenix Liberty Festival, held at a Christian school in Phoenix and organized by a Christian organization called "We Make History," which has the goal of converting children to Christianity.

Contact: San Jose Unified School District, Calif.

Violation: A Willow Glen High School teacher showed the evangelical Christian movie "Courageous" to his class.

Contact: City of Glencoe, Ala.

Violation: The city flies a Christian flag at City Hall.

Contact: Middle Grove C-1 School District, Madison, Mo.

Violation: A girls basketball coach facilitates prayer in the pregame huddle and before and after practice. Group prayers are held at many school functions, such as back-to-school dinners, school picnics and within classrooms.

Contact: Lauderdale County School System, Ala.

Violation: Brooks Elementary School hosted a bible distribution, and Killen First Baptist Church has been allowed to evangelize to students at Brooks High School band practices.

Contact: McDonald's restaurant, LaVonia, Ga.

Violation: The restaurant offered a church bulletin discount.

Contact: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Violation: Various VA centers only sell religious books.

Contact: Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders, N.J.

Violation: The county's Historic Preservation Trust Fund has awarded millions of dollars to churches since 2003.



An Indiana public school district posted this on its Facebook page after getting an FFRF complaint letter. The school prayer photo is from 2012.

FFRF schools Eastern Howard on Constitution, history

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover sent a complaint letter Feb. 23 to Superintendent Tracy Caddell of the Eastern Howard School Corp. in Greentown, Ind., about statements Caddell made to the Kokomo Tribune about how the school district is mostly Christian and how schools strive to teach "Christian values" without Christian doctrine.

The article also quoted choir instructor Karol Evenson: "Before a concert or a show that we do, we always stand in a circle and pray. Most times I lead it . . . and sometimes a student will step up to do it." She also noted that the annual Christmas program includes a nativity scene enacted by faculty members.

"It is irrelevant that Ms. Evenson claims that she has never received a complaint about these religious practices," Grover wrote. "The Constitution is specifically set up to prevent gov-

ernment actors from treading on the rights of underrepresented minority groups."

High school teacher Peter Heck talked in the story about two religious quotes on his classroom walls. One is a quote misattributed to President George Washington that contains historical inaccuracies.

"We imagine that as a history teacher, Mr. Heck will want to correct this embarrassing mistake for his students," Grover wrote.

Liberty Counsel, a Religious Right law firm, contacted Caddell after seeing FFRF's complaint. Grover wrote a follow-up letter to inform the district how Liberty Counsel often misrepresents the law and claims its legal services come at no cost to public entities, when in fact, school districts can be on the hook for considerable legal fees when they lose court cases.

Contact: Volusia County Council, DeLand, Fla.

Violation: The council appropriated \$350,000 to repair and maintain a church.

Contact: Jefferson County School District 509-J, Madras, Ore.

Violation: The Good News Club was permitted to park a trailer at Warm Springs K-8 Academy during school hours to hold religious instruction.

Contact: Easton Area School Board, Pa.

Violation: The board was considering adding prayer to its monthly meetings.

Contact: Winnebago County Child Support Agency, Oshkosh, Wis.

Violation: A county employee had a religious email signature.

Contact: Ogle County Board, Oregon, Ill.

Violation: The board was debating allowing a new statute to be placed at the War Veterans memorial at the county courthouse that includes a Latin cross.

Contact: Bells City Schools, Bells, Tenn.

Violation: Bells Elementary School's holiday concert opened with a prayer, and students sang songs referencing Jesus.

Contact: Killeen Independent School District, Texas

Violation: Clarke Elementary School first graders who chose not to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance were disciplined.

Contact: Blount County Commission, Maryville, Tenn.

Violation: The county seal includes an image of a church captioned by the word "RELIGION."

Contact: Octorara Area School District, Atglen, Pa.

Violation: The district hosts recruitment assemblies for the Boy Scouts of America at elementary schools during the school day.

Contact: Seminole County Public Schools, Oviedo, Fla.

Violation: Stenstrom Elementary School allowed East Pointe Church to post promotional signs on school property.

Contact: Knox County Public Schools, Knoxville, Tenn.

Violation: A church flier was placed in the mailbox of every teacher at Green Magnet Academy.

Contact: Hinds County Board attorney, Raymond, Miss.

Violation: The county tax collector's publication "The Fair Report" included a "Scripture of the Month."

Contact: Forsyth R-III Schools, Mo.

Violation: Forsyth High School allows a youth pastor at First Baptist Church to sit with students at lunch, distribute church brochures and encourage church attendance.

Contact: Lebanon R-III School District, Mo.

Violation: An Esther Elementary kindergarten teacher read her class a story about Jesus and the "true" meaning of Christmas and distributed coloring books with a nativity scene.

Contact: Sacramento County Sheriff's Department, Calif.

Continued on page 23

Chicago atheists ‘come out’ again

FFRF and its Metropolitan Chicago Chapter placed their third set of friendly but thought-provoking billboards that feature the diverse faces and “testimonials” of Chicago-area atheists, agnostics and freethinkers.

Eleven “Out of the Closet” billboards went up in December. Three more featuring groups of freethinkers, including Chicago Black Skeptics, went up after New Year’s.

A final batch of seven went up in early March, mostly in northside neighborhoods. One features a smiling former minister, Rich Pope of Northfield, proclaiming “No magic. No miracles. No imaginary friends.”

Three represent couples. Jenn and Ben Zalisko note: “We found love in an atheist community!” Ray Belmonte and Rick Schuch, who are both physicians and atheists, have a plainspoken

message: “Religion is a collection of man-made fairy tales.” Their dog, Rufus, is also pictured. Alexandra Lafaurie and Melinda Dunker of Chicago, both consultants and freethinkers, ask: “Find it hard to believe in God? You’re not alone.”

Cheryl Purnell, a Chicago graphic designer who identifies as a freethinker, says “Freethought and adventure are my allies!”

Youth is represented by student Vivien Castillo, who declares: “This happy heathen is good without God.”

“No gods. Just human goodness” is the message of retired Glencoe veterinarian Allen Cosnow.

“Although nearly 20% of the population today is nonreligious in the United States, many Americans have never knowingly met an atheist or agnostic,” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-

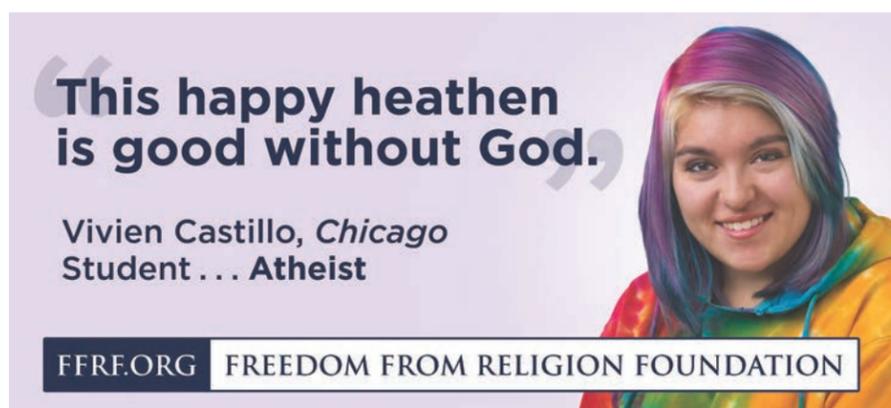
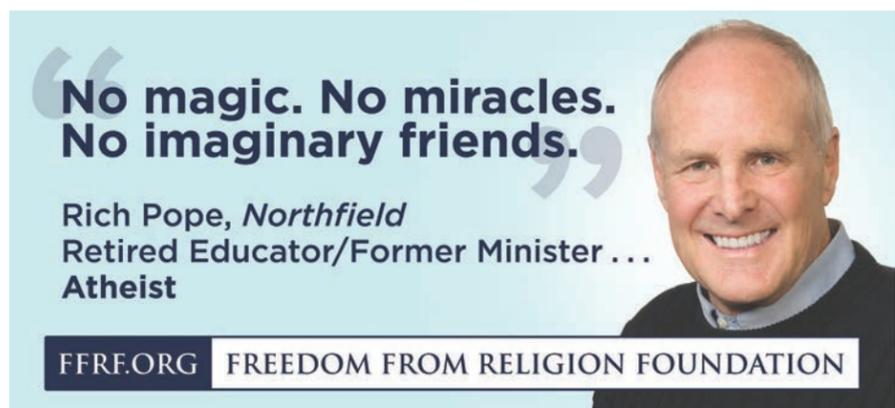
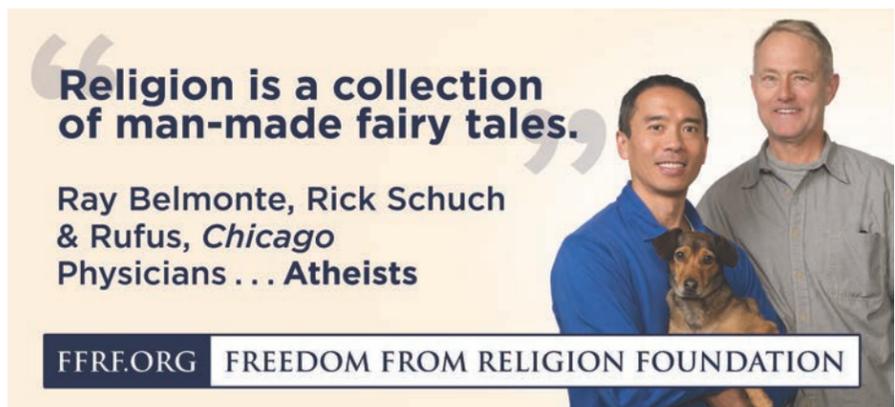
president. “We’re proud to introduce our Chicago-area members and their viewpoints to their community. Freethinkers have an important message to contribute to society — that reason, not dogma, should prevail, and that freedom depends on keeping religion out of government.”

Since debuting the “Out of the Clos-

et” campaign in Madison, Wis., in 2010, FFRF has taken it to Columbus, Tulsa, Raleigh, Phoenix, Nashville, Portland, Spokane, Sacramento, Cleveland and Akron.

Make your own “virtual billboard” or upload a short freethought video statement here:

ffrf.org/get-involved/come-out-of-the-closet



Chicagoans can be good without God



“Can we be good without God?” was the topic of the debate between FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and New Testament Professor Dr. Constantine Campbell on March 5 at the University of Illinois-Chicago. The standing-room-only event (they brought in 50 additional chairs) was hosted by Cru (a Christian club) and the Secular Student Society (SSS) affiliated with the Secular Student Alliance and co-sponsored by UIC’s Program in Religious Studies.

The photo at left includes members of SSA and Cru. SSS Vice President



Sarah Wright and Dan Barker flank the podium, with Dr. Campbell beside Dan. SSS President Matthew Von Moss is at far right. The photo at right includes FFRF Chicago-area chapter members. Front row: Kathi Wise, Mary Ann Anderson. Back: Margaret Aguilar, Frank Aguilar, Bob Elmore, Joel Frazin, chapter president Tom Cara, and former minister Drew Bekius.

A Youtube video of the two-hour debate can be viewed at: <http://bit.ly/1x9aqf2>

In the News

Atheist activist Roy hacked to death

Atheist activist Avijit Roy, 42, Atlanta, was hacked to death with machetes Feb. 26 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He and his wife Rafida Ahmed, 45, who was seriously wounded, were returning from a book fair.

Roy, a Bangladesh-born U.S. citizen, had received multiple threats from Islamic fundamentalists. Ahmed and Roy and six other expatriate Bangladeshis in 2001 founded Mukto-Mona, a secular website.

Roy and Ahmed were in Dhaka primarily to visit his elderly mother. News reports said the assailants are believed to belong to the extremist group Ansarullah Bangla Team. Roy was pulled from a rickshaw and killed.

Religious Marine's conviction upheld

The U.S. Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals upheld on Feb. 26 the court martial conviction of Monifa Sterling, an active-duty Marine stationed at Camp Lejeune, N.C., for disobeying an order to remove three signs with a bible verse from her desk.

Sterling's job was sitting at a desk with a computer to resolve issues with base "smart" access cards. She had taped copies of Isaiah 54:17 ("no weapon formed against me shall prosper") to the computer and monitor and her inbox.

She testified she posted it in three places to represent the Christian trinity. The court rejected Sterling's free exercise and RFRA defenses: "[W]e reject the appellant's invitation to define 'religious exercise' as any action subjectively believed by the appellant to be 'religious in nature.'"

Egyptians sentenced for blasphemy

Egyptian student Sherif Gaber, 22, was given a one-year prison sentence Feb. 16 for contempt of religion related to his activities at Suez Canal University in 2013. Teaching staff and fellow students reported him for positive posts about atheism on Facebook. A retrial that could increase the sen-

tence to over two years will be scheduled soon.

Gaber told Daily News Egypt his troubles started when he challenged a science teacher for calling for gays to "be crucified in the middle of the streets." While jailed, he was beaten by guards, who administered electric shocks. He lives alone in an apartment.

In January, student Karim Al-Banna was given a three-year sentence for blasphemy. He was accused of using Facebook to publish articles that "belittle the divine," with his father collecting information against him.

Atheist website blocked in Turkey

Al-Arabiya reported March 4 that a Turkish court in an Ankara suburb blocked access to a website for Ateizm Derneği (Atheist Society), the country's first atheist association, ruling it was an "insult to religious values." The court said the group was engaged in "activities likely to disturb public order."

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in 2014 suggested a link between atheists and terrorists.

Court agrees judge out of line

The 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals on Feb. 13 affirmed a \$734,000 damage award to Michigan state court deputy administrator Julie Pucci, who sued in 2007 when her position was terminated after she lodged official complaints about Judge Mark Somers expressing his religious views while performing judicial duties. It also affirmed the award of \$416,000 in attorneys' fees, Religion Clause reported.

A federal court ruled in 2011 that Pucci's complaints involved matters of public concern and were made in her capacity as a concerned citizen by approaching the State Court Administrator's Office.

Government prayer bill loses 8-7

On Feb. 23, the Virginia Senate General Laws and Technology Committee narrowly defeated on an 8-7



The Wakulla County Commission voted 4-1 on Jan. 5 to approve Chairman Ralph Thomas' motion to put "In God We Trust" in the commission's chambers in Crawfordville, Fla., even though it was already there on the state seal. Commissioner Howard Kessler, a semi-retired orthopedic surgeon, voted no. "Our founding fathers went to great lengths to establish a separation of church and state. Our country was not founded as a theocracy or religious law," Kessler said, holding up a Nazi belt buckle with the words "Gott mit uns" on it. "God was with them, in the mind of people," Kessler added. Resident Bill Russell told the commission the godly oath "should be near the entrance of every county building."

vote a bill to authorize prayers at all state and local government meetings. Richard Bell, R-Staunton, sponsored the bill, which passed 69-30 in the House of Delegates. meetings.

The bill was supported by the conservative Family Foundation of Virginia but opposed by Baptist and Jewish groups and the ACLU of Virginia.

ISIS sacks Iraqi museums, libraries

According to a report Feb. 26 in the UK Daily Mail, ISIS forces in the northern Iraq city of Mosul sacked museums and libraries to rid them of all non-Islamic content. Video posted on an ISIS Twitter account showed ancient statues being destroyed with sledgehammers and power drills.

"The Prophet ordered us to get rid of statues and relics, and his companions did the same when they conquered countries after him," one man says on the video.

Religion Clause noted that terrorists blew up the Mosul Public Library, with its collection of Iraqi newspapers for

the past century and maps and books from the Ottoman Empire. "This comes a month after terrorists loaded 2,000 secular books from the library on trucks to be burned because the books supposedly promote infidelity and call for disobeying Allah."

Destruction was also reported at a Sunni Muslim library and Christian church libraries, with alleged death threats to anyone trying to hide books.

Lawyer wants God off court bench

Nicholas Gelfuso, a lawyer from Providence, R.I., filed a federal lawsuit March 4 challenging the inscription above the bench of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, "Non Sub Homine Sed Sub Deo Et Lege" ("Not under man but under God and law"). Gelfuso alleges the statement violates the First Amendment proscription against established religion and endorses a "particular religious viewpoint" with which he does not agree.

Diana Hassel, a constitutional law professor at Roger Williams University, told GoLocalProv.com that the U.S. Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of "ceremonial deism" meant to solemnize an occasion or institution.

Florist invokes Judas, refuses to settle

A Washington state trial court ruled Feb. 18 that the owner of a Richland florist shop violated state equal protection laws by refusing to sell flowers for a man's same-sex wedding ceremony. The court rejected free speech and free exercise claims by owner Barro-nelle Stutzman, 70.

"The law is clear: If you choose to provide a service to couples of the opposite sex, you must provide the same service to same-sex couples," said Attorney General Bob Ferguson, who offered to settle the suit for a penalty of \$2,001.

Stutzman turned the offer down the next day. "You are asking me to walk in the way of a well-known betrayer, one who sold something of infinite worth for 30 pieces of silver. That is something I will not do."

In Memoriam

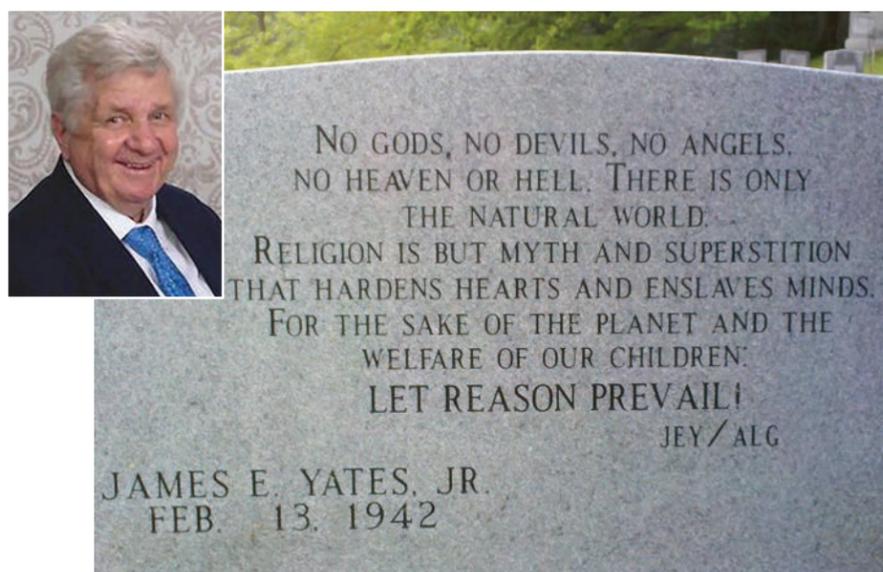
James E. Yates Jr.

James Everett Yates Jr., 72, Taylors Valley, Va., died unexpectedly Jan. 29, 2015, in Spartanburg Regional Medical Center in Spartanburg, S.C.

He grew up in Tazewell, Va., graduated from high school in Tennessee and attended Chandler Technical Institute in Willoughby, Ohio, Automation Institute in Cleveland, East Tennessee State University and Steed College in Johnson City, Tenn.

He worked in data processing with General Electric and spent most of his career with CSX Railroad. A part-time musician, he played saxophone with several well-known local groups.

Survivors include five children, Tracy (Steve) Lineberry, Draper, Va.; Stacie (Brad) Glaser, Palmer, Alaska; Keith (Paige) Yates, Riner, Va.; James Thomas (Chloe Anne) Yates, Damascus, Va.; a sister and two brothers; 15



Jim Yates' gravestone adapts the winter solstice quote by Anne Gaylor.

grandchildren and two great-grandchildren; and his fiancée, Mary Wooten, Campobello, S.C.

"My father was a strong voice for FFRF and very much believed in everything you stand for (I do as well)," Keith Yates wrote. "Thank you for ev-

erything, but most of all thank you for bringing together all of the minds of reason."

FFRF offers sincerest condolences to Jim's family and friends and thanks for his support of reason and the foundation.

FFRF national convention speech, Los Angeles, Oct. 25, 2014

Photographer Johnson documents satisfying secular lives

FFRF Board chair STEPHEN HIRTLE:

This morning I'm going to introduce our next speaker, Chris Johnson. He is a New York City-based photographer and filmmaker and received his undergraduate degree in film production from Concordia University in Montréal, Quebec. His photography can be seen in *The New York Times* and other publications. He is the recipient of the Kodak Award for Excellence in Filmmaking as well as the B.F. Lorenzetti Scholarship for Excellence in Filmmaking. His work in art direction and production design can be seen in several films, including "The Pen and the Sword," produced in part by the National Film Board of Canada.

For the past few years, he has traveled the world, meeting famous atheists, infamous atheists and just everyday atheists. He's put his photography and stories together in a wonderful book called *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy and Meaning in a World Without God*. I urge you to use it to collect atheist signatures from your favorite atheists [in attendance here]. In the meantime, let's hear Chris Johnson talk about his work.

By Chris Johnson

Wonderful! Good morning. Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited to be here in Los Angeles. As a filmmaker, I'm especially excited to be here in this particular room where the Oscars were held. That's pretty cool for me.

As was mentioned, I spent about two to three years working on this project and I'm going to tell you a little bit about the story behind that and how it all came together. Before I do that, I want to talk about one of my favorite movies. It's about C.S. Lewis. Shocking, I know! It's a movie called "Shadowlands" directed by the late Richard

Attenborough.

It's about C.S. Lewis later on in his life and his romantic relationship with an American divorcée. So it's not really about the religion thing, but one of the scenes that always stuck out to me is where Lewis, played by Anthony Hopkins, is talking about God. Let me play a clip for you. [CLIP PLAYS]

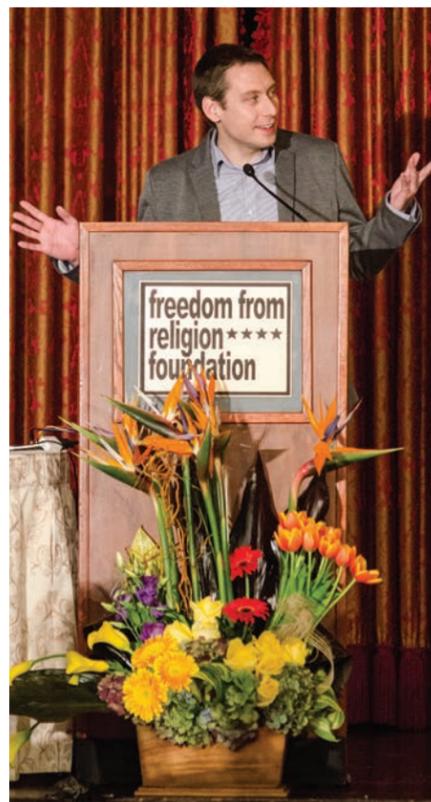
"[God] wants us to be able to love and be loved." I happen to agree with one third of that statement. People often ask me, "What are the overarching themes that you learned talking to these 100 atheists from around the world?" ["To love and be loved"] would pretty much be it.

One of the themes that runs through the book is love. Now as far as we know, we only have this one life, right? And if you really take it to heart, it changes the way you see your family, your friendships, your relationships and your experiences.

I quoted in my introduction to *A Better Life* A. A. Milne's beautiful line from *Winnie the Pooh*: "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." One of my favorite photos from the book is of writer and blogger Greta Christina in San Francisco with her partner Ingrid. Just a fun little bit of trivia: Behind them you can see plates on the wall. That's called the "Great Wall of China." [laughter]. But let's go back to where it all started.

I was on a road trip with my brother three years ago, going through the Southwest. This is White Sands National Monument in New Mexico [photo], which if you haven't been, is incredible. I was taking photos of this amazing, gorgeous place and my brother said, "You should do a book of your photography." I said, "Nobody knows who I am, nobody cares. There are so many books out there. No publisher would want to do that."

"Well, you just have to make it different," he said, so I thought about it. We were listening to a lot of podcasts on religion, something that had always



Chris Johnson addressing FFRF's 2014 national convention in Los Angeles.

(Photo by Ingrid Laas)

interested me. I have always been an atheist, but I found religion interesting and had minored in religious studies in college.

Being in that space, being in that gorgeous beautiful space surrounded by sand and mountains, I thought, you know, there are people out there who think that this was put here by God, or that without God this is pointless or meaningless. What if somebody were to make a book showing not necessarily what we're pushing against, but what we believe, what we love and what we cherish?

That's one of the things I felt, that there are so many great books talking about why there's no God, why we don't believe, and those [books] are important. But one thing that I thought was missing was, "What do we believe?" If there is no God, now what? Atheists, by the way, as you all know, aren't very well liked in this country.

[CLIP: HATEFUL COMMENTS FROM "BELIEVERS"]

Oh, Newt Gingrich. So that's what I was going against, right? I had this idea, I wanted to do this book, but nobody knew who I was and I didn't have any money. I was a struggling artist living in New York, until I found Kickstarter. I found Kickstarter and decided to do a campaign, and I basically crowd-funded this project. It took about two months, the most stressful two months of my life.

Not everybody was particularly excited about this project. One YouTube comment that I got said, "Please die in a car crash or other accident." There are two things that I like about that. One, I like that they said "please." And the second is that they gave me a choice. I mean, they are fine if I die in a car crash or they're fine with some "other accident."

I also got emails like this — a ser-

viceman in Iraq telling me he was an atheist and was excited about the work I was going to be doing. I also get other emails. "I'm a 60-year-old 'still in the closet' atheist. I have to be due to my conservative, narrow-minded western Pennsylvania surroundings." Hello, Pennsylvania.

Another: "Life makes more sense now. I can live for now and enjoy my life, not suffer that I won't burn for eternity. Losing my religion has been such a refreshing change. I'm anxious for your book to be published, though I'll have to hide it under my bed so my wife doesn't find it." It was going so well up to that last sentence.

This is the funding graph of my Kickstarter. The line at the top, that's the goal, and as you can see, it was a very stressful two months but I made it. I was off, traveling around the United States, Canada, the UK, talking to atheists from different professions, backgrounds and things like that. I visited some really amazing cities both abroad and in the U.S. I met some really incredible people.

There is Nahla Mahmoud [photo]. She's a Sudanese refugee living in London. The bottom right is Carol Blue, the widow of Christopher Hitchens. And of course you recognize the top right, Donald Johanson, who spoke here last night. We're holding a replica of Lucy.

Some other familiar faces you might recognize from the book — people here at the conference — we have Jessica Ahlquist, who will be speaking directly after me, and Dan Barker, playing the piano, Annie Laurie, Sean Carroll and Anthony Pinn. In the front row here, Margaret Downey. There's Dawkins, of course.

One of the most frequent questions I get is, "How did you find these people?" Some of them I knew because I read their works, like Dawkins, Hitchens, people like that. Some were just friends of mine. I have a friend in the book who's an airline pilot and happens to be an atheist.

Here's one of the most interesting stories. One day I was at a friend's house in New York, where we were watching "60 Minutes" on CBS, and I saw this particular clip [of mountain climber Alex Honnold].

Who wants to go to Yosemite? I saw this clip and I thought, "If he's an atheist, he needs to be in my book." So I went to Yosemite and met with Alex. Just to give you a little perspective on that rock where he's sitting, here's another picture from above. He's not afraid of heights. You can watch the whole segment of Alex on "60 Minutes" [search for "ascent of Alex Honnold" on YouTube]. It's really incredible to learn more about him.

Here are some of the other people from the book I want to introduce you to: Pat Churchland is a neurophilosopher. There she is down in San Diego, with one of her beautiful golden retrievers, Farley. One thing Pat talked to me about in my interview with her was celebrating from a secular perspective.

Continued on page 22



From *A Better Life* by Chris Johnson: A photo of climber and atheist Alex Honnold on top of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Jonathan Bailey, 33, New Orleans: Indecent relationship with a juvenile. Bailey, 33, a married youth minister at First Baptist Church, is accused of molesting a 14-year-old girl. David Crosby, head pastor of the 2,000-member church, said video cameras captured an "uncomfortable" situation.

"When I talked to [the alleged victim] and heard her story, that's when I realized this is something I have to report to police," Crosby said, adding that he fired Bailey and escorted him off church grounds. *Source: WDSU, 2-27-15*

Abu Bilal Ismail, Aarhus, Denmark: Incitement of hatred. Ismail, an imam at Grimhøj Mosque, was charged by German prosecutors for leading a prayer last July at a Berlin mosque in which he called for the death of "Zionist Jews."

The prayer was captured on video: "Count them and kill them to the very last one. Don't spare a single one of them. Make them suffer terribly."

Ismail later claimed he only "prayed for God to destroy those Jews who kill us. It's not all Jews, because I know Jews who are good toward us." *Source: Intl. Business Times, 2-27-15*

Ubaldo Ocasio, 51, Cleveland: Rape, sexual battery, gross sexual imposition, kidnapping and intimidation of a witness. Ocasio is accused of assaulting a 16-year-old. Police said he's a pastor at a church on Cleveland's west side. Members of El Buen Pastor Lutheran Church claimed Ocasio rented space in the building but wasn't employed by their church. *Source: newsnet5.com, 2-26-15*

Hector Aguirre, 35, Attleboro, MA: Rape, intimidation of a witness and 4 counts of indecent assault and battery. Aguirre, pastor of Iglesia Arca de Salvación, is charged with molesting a teen parishioner in 2001-03, starting when she was 13.

Prosecutor Stephen Nadeau Jr. said the teen's mother found a note from Aguirre inside her daughter's bible, after which they met with the pastor, his wife and other church officials, but nothing was done, Nadeau alleged.

"She was told she was lying, that she had the spirit of Jezebel and was influenced by the devil," Nadeau said. *Source: Sun Chronicle, 2-25-15*

Clovis Vilchez-Parra, 34, Arlington Heights, IL: Reproduction of child pornography and possession of child pornography. Vilchez-Parra is an associate pastor at Mission San Juan Diego Catholic Church. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 2-25-15*

Eric Silver, 72, Cheshire, CT: 3 counts of indecent liberties with a child. Silver, who retired in 2010 as rabbi at Temple Beth David, is charged in Norfolk County, VA, stemming from incidents in 1968-70 with a single alleged victim under age 15.

According to a 2010 news story, Silver moved from a large Long Island, NY, synagogue to the 130-family Temple Beth David because he wanted to serve a smaller, more intimate congregation. "I wanted to know everybody's name," he said at the time. *Source: Record-Journal, 2-25-15*

Corby Blanton, 32, Caledonia, OH: 5 counts of unlawful sexual conduct with a minor. Blanton, pastor at Memorial United Methodist and youth pastor at First United Methodist, is accused of sexual abuse of an alleged victim between 2008-12, starting when the boy was 14.

"I needed to sit down it was such a surprise," said parishioner Andy Kazee.

"It's very sad that someone in that position could take advantage of someone so young," said Cardington Police Chief John Hinton. He said the sexual conduct is alleged to have occurred at Blanton's homes. *Source: News Journal, 2-23-15*

Donald Carter, Skiatook, OK: Rape. U.S. marshals in Florida arrested Carter, former pastor of Remnant Church in Sperry, as he got off a flight from Colombia, where he went in January after allegations surfaced. He's accused of raping a girl in 2006. Authorities suspect there may be other victims.

"I thought I knew him better than anyone. I was fooled," said Carter's ex-wife of nearly 40 years, who didn't want to be identified. "The first [alleged victim] told me in great detail, but the others . . . didn't want to tell me. They wanted to tell a law enforcement person."

The state statute of limitations for rape is 12 years. *Source: Fox 23, 2-20-15*

Dan W. Haby Jr., 52, Alvarado, TX: Indecency with a child by sexual contact. Haby, who resigned in November as pastor at Cow-



The weekly's Feb. 26 cover story detailed claims about sex abuse at the 37,000-member megachurch in Plano, Texas.

boy Way Church, was indicted by a Johnson County grand jury for allegedly touching a teen boy's genitals in 2006 and trying to put his hand down the boy's pants in 2007, including once at a Pizza Hut in Burleson.

A Tarrant County grand jury indicted him Dec. 14 on 2 counts of indecency with a child/fondling. His wife, Melanie Haby, resigned as co-pastor in December. *Source: Star-Telegram, 2-20-15*

Randall Shreiner, 58, West Lampeter, PA: Criminal homicide. Shreiner, former Lord's House of Prayer pastor and married father of 3 adult children, is charged in the shooting death of his former mistress, Monica Lee Miller, 44, in the parking lot behind her apartment.

Miller's daughter told investigators her mother and Shreiner were intimately involved off and on for about 2 years, court documents said, with Shreiner allegedly telling her he'd leave his wife but he never did. *Source: WFMN, 2-19-15*

Delso Eli Erazo, 69, Spring, TX: Indecency with a child. Erazo, pastor and co-founder of Iglesia Cristiana Monte Sinai de Houston, is accused of sexual contact with a girl, now 15, who alleges he first touched her private parts in her bedroom when she was 6.

The complaint states the most recent alleged incident was in December. A family member told a reporter the girl and Erazo are related. *Source: KTRK, 2-17-15*

Mohammad A. Saleem, 75, Gilberts, IL: Criminal sexual abuse. Saleem, founder of the Institute of Islamic Education in Elgin and a prominent imam, is charged with assaulting a 23-year-old administrative assistant at the school in a series of incidents.

The woman has also filed a civil suit [see "Civil Lawsuits Filed" below] alleging Saleem molested her and 3 teen girls at the grade 6-12 school as far back as the 1980s. *Source: AP, 2-17-15*

Floyd L. McCoy, 50, Hormigueros, Puerto Rico: Lewd acts with a minor. McCoy was suspended in September as a priest by the Catholic Diocese of Mayaguez after being accused of molesting a 14-year-old boy between 2013-14. A criminal investigation then ensued. *Source: AP, 2-17-15*

Marguerite Haragan, 58, Boise, ID: 2 counts of malicious harassment. Prosecutors claim Haragan stalked a Jewish woman by phone and at her home, once allegedly banging on the woman's window while shouting she'd "better believe in Jesus."

When "AG," the alleged victim, opened her door to get Haragan's license plate number, she was slapped, thrown to the ground and kicked in the stomach, the report said. Two days later, "death" was written on her mailbox. *Source: KTVB, 2-15-15*

Police in Bhopal, India, are seeking **Santosh Kumar Kaushik**, a Hindu priest accused

of raping a 34-year-old woman during an exorcism. The woman alleges Kaushik told her she was possessed by an evil spirit, which he would come to her home to drive out.

According to the complaint, the woman's husband, a rickshaw driver, was asked to leave the house and returned to find her naked with pain in her private parts. The priest allegedly threatened her with harm if she said anything. *Source: Hindustan Times, 2-11-15*

Jason C. Black, 40, Milton, W.VA: Misdemeanor domestic assault and battery. The complaint alleged Black, pastor at Good Shepherd Freewill Baptist Church, slapped his wife Monetta, bruising her cheek, and twice threatened to kill her before leaving their house.

Monetta Black later told a reporter on the phone that the incident was blown out of proportion and she wanted charges dropped. *Source: Herald-Dispatch, 2-10-15*

Yona Metzger, 61, Jerusalem: Bribery, fraud and breach of trust, fraud under aggravating circumstances, theft via agent, conspiracy to commit a crime, money laundering and tax fraud, all while acting in his capacity as Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel from 2003-13. Metzger is accused of receiving about \$2.5 million in bribes and keeping \$1.8 million of it.

"The investigation painted a clear picture according to which [Metzger] received bribes and illicit funds for years in exchange for using his position and influence over issues like donations, *giur* (conversion to Judaism), rabbi appointments as well as ties with business moguls in exchange for personal gain," the indictment read.

Millions more shekels were allegedly transferred to nonprofits connected to the rabbi. *Source: ynetnews.com, 2-10-15*

George Hunley, 53, Louisa, VA: Knowingly giving a false report of a crime to law enforcement with the intent to mislead. Hunley, a Protestant minister for 32 years, told police he'd been robbed and shot twice after stopping to help a couple whose blue Ford Taurus was stalled.

"Everything right now points to us believing there was no armed robbery," said sheriff's Maj. Don Lowe. "There was no biracial couple; none of that really happened."

Hunley may also have to pay the cost of the search. Police had no explanation of why he had 2 bullet wounds in his leg.

CBS 6 first reported on Hunley in April 2014 when his home burnt to the ground when a turkey fryer malfunctioned. *Source: CBS 6, 2-8-15*

Scott E. Murphy, 44, Newark, OH: 1 count each of sexual battery, endangering a child, disseminating matter harmful to juveniles, impugning and illegal use of a minor in nudity-oriented material or performance. Murphy, Newark Heights Church of God pastor, was indicted by a grand jury for allegedly engaging in sexual con-

duct and exchanging nude photos in November, December and January with a 15-year-old parishioner. The church website no longer lists him as pastor. *Source: Newark Advocate, 2-5-15*

Adam D'Albero, 34, Drums, PA: Corruption of minors, indecent assault and prohibited contact with a minor. D'Albero is accused of molesting a girl, then 13, when he was youth pastor at Mountain View Community Church in 2011. The relationship allegedly continued for about a year.

The girl told police she didn't report the alleged incidents because she "feared what D'Albero would do to her family." He's married and has a 9-year-old daughter, whom he's not allowed to have contact with now. *Source: Wilkes Barre Times-Leader, 2-4-15*

Wayne M. Jones, 53, Ajax, Ontario: 2 counts of sexual assault and 3 counts of fraud. Jones, pastor of United Spiritual Baptist Church in Scarborough, is accused of molesting a woman during "spiritual guidance" sessions, which included exorcisms, and swindling her between May 2011 and May 2013.

Police believe there may be more victims. *Source: Toronto Star, 2-4-15*

Lyle Kamlet, 62, Mt. Vernon, NY: Receiving and possessing child pornography. Rabbi Kamlet, who resigned in 2012 as a Judaic studies teacher at a Jewish day school in Mamaroneck, is accused of buying mail-order porn from 2008-10, which he had delivered to a school and then allegedly took home. The complaint doesn't name the school.

Parents of students at the school where Kamlet resigned were notified about the charges, said Rabbi Joshua Lookstein, head of Westchester Day School. *Source: Journal News, 2-3-15*

Denis Roy, 45, Brownsburg, IN: Misdemeanor theft. Roy, pastor of New Day Church and a Brownsburg police chaplain, is charged with stealing clothing from Goodwill.

"The investigation is leading us down a path that Goodwill believes Mr. Roy has actually committed theft in the past from their establishment, so that is something we are looking into," said police Capt. Jennifer Pyatt-Barrett. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 1-27-15*

A judge in Granada, Spain, dropped sex abuse indictments against 9 Catholic priests and 2 lay workers but left standing a charge against another priest alleged to have molested teen boys at his residence in 2004-07.

Judge Antonio Moreno ruled that a 3-year statute of limitations applied to the dismissed charges. The priest still under indictment, **Román Martínez**, faces a more serious charge for which the statute of limitations is 10 years.

David Ramírez Castillo was 7 when he met Martínez as a catechism student and later was an altar boy. Ramírez, now 25 and still a Catholic, has alleged serial abuse by Martínez and claims he was made to watch sexual acts by others, including priests, starting in 2004 when he was 14.

Moreno's report detailed Ramírez's claims about the priests' sexual practices, including a bedside flask of rosemary oil and a description of a birthmark on Martínez's penis. *Source: BBC/NTimes, 1-27-15*

Donald C. Biggs, 36, Jacksonville, OR: Invasion of personal privacy, 2 counts of 2nd-degree burglary, 6 counts each of using a child in display of sexually explicit conduct and 1st-degree encouragement of child sex abuse and 2 counts each of private indecency and 2nd-degree burglary. Biggs, who resigned last fall as administrative youth pastor at Mountain Christian Fellowship in Medford, was found in possession of 28 videos allegedly recorded with a camera hidden in a bathroom in his home. They depict unclothed women and girls, ages 13 to 21, a police news release said.

The burglary charges stem from break-ins in January at the church in which police said computer hard drives were stolen. *Source: oregonlive.com, 1-23-15*

Peter Bass, 36, Brooks, OR: 10 counts of 1st-degree rape. Bass is youth pastor at Brooks Assembly of God ("The Valley's Friendly Church").

Sheriff's Sgt. Chris Baldrige declined to release the probable cause statement and date of the incidents due to the nature of the case and noting that juveniles were involved.

Bail was set at \$1 million at a hearing at which Bass declined to enter a plea. *Source: Statesman Journal, 1-23-15*

Scott Morey, 42, Shevlin, MN: 16 counts of criminal sexual conduct, alleged between 2009-14 with 3 juvenile males while he was pastor at 3 Minnesota Synod Lutheran churches.

An alleged victim told authorities he was 9 when the abuse started and continued for 7 years. Court documents said the boys were offered money, iPods and phones to have sex.

Source: *Bemidji Pioneer*, 1-21-15

Frederick M. "Ephraim" Karp, 50, Beachwood, **NY**: Perverted practice, sex offense, sex abuse of a minor and sex abuse. Karp, an Orthodox rabbi and director of spiritual living at Menorah Park Senior Living, was arrested on a Maryland warrant which alleges he molested a girl for about 5 years, starting when she was 7.

Two of the girl's sisters have since made similar allegations. Karp was arrested at John F. Kennedy International Airport as he awaited a flight to Israel. Source: *Baltimore/Cleveland Jewish News*, 1-22/2-8-15

Nicholas Lawrence, 27, Pekin, **IL**: 4 counts of predatory criminal sexual assault of a child for an alleged relationship with a preteen girl who considered him her "spiritual mentor" as youth pastor at Peoria Heights Congregational Church. He was charged in September and October with aggravated criminal sexual abuse of a child younger than 13 and a child pornography count involving the same girl in another county.

Court documents said Lawrence admitted meeting the girl in a church closet during breaks from bible classes. He was fired in June. Source: *Peoria Journal Star*, 1-16-15

Pleaded / Convicted

Anthony McSweeney, 68, **London**: Guilty by jury of indecent assault and 3 counts of making indecent images of children. McSweeney, a former Catholic priest dubbed "the fat vicar," was convicted of molesting a boy at Grafton Close Children's Home about 3 decades ago.

The home was run by **John Stingemore**, who was found dead in January weeks before he was due to stand trial on similar charges. Child porn was found on McSweeney's computer after his 2013 arrest. Source: *Daily Mail*, 2-27-15

Gregorio Martinez, 47, Jersey City, **NJ**: Guilty by jury of aggravated criminal sexual contact, child abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. At the time of the incidents with a 13-year-old boy in 2012, Martinez was a deacon at Third Bethesda Pentecostal Church and knew the boy through the church. He is now co-pastor at Elohim Church in North Bergen.

He was found guilty of touching the boy's genitals and kissing him on the lips in a Walmart parking lot while the boy's mother was inside buying diapers. Source: *Jersey Journal*, 2-25-15

Barry Freundel, 63, **Washington**: Pleaded guilty to 52 counts of voyeurism. Each is a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail. Freundel, rabbi at Keshet Israel synagogue, admitted making videos with hidden cameras of about 150 women in the changing and showering area of the National Capital Mikvah.

The setup "utilized up to three recording devices at the same time to obtain different angles of each woman being recorded," the plea agreement stated. Source: *AP*, 2-19-15

Eugene Klein, 66, **Chicago**: Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the federal government by passing messages in 2011 from imprisoned mobster **Frank Calabrese Sr.**, now deceased, to outside contacts. Klein, a Catholic priest and retired federal prison chaplain, admitted working with Calabrese associates to recover a violin worth an estimated \$1 million hidden in Calabrese's vacation home in Williams Bay, WI.

The property had been seized by the federal government and was up for sale. One message suggested posing as buyers and grabbing the violin after distracting the real estate agent, but the home had already been sold. Source: *Chicago Tribune*, 2-11-15

Larry M. Berkley, 35, Henning, **TN**: Guilty by jury of 2 counts of rape and 4 counts each of statutory rape by an authority figure, sexual battery by an authority figure and aggravated statutory rape. Berkley was charged for crimes against 3 children over a 2-year period while he was senior pastor of Victory Baptist Church.

He also faces a March 30 trial date on sexual abuse charges involving several children allegedly committed while he was pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church in Harrison, **AR**. Source: *WREG*, 1-28-15

Roy Harriger, 70, Lyndonville, **NY**: Guilty by jury of 2 counts of coercive criminal sexual conduct against a child. Harriger was accused of molesting 2 of his grandchildren 12 years ago while he was pastor of Wesleyan Church.

Although at least 15 people in 3 states have now signed affidavits accusing him of child sexual abuse, Harriger continues to preach at Community Fellowship Church in Hartland. Sentencing is set for April 6.

His daughter-in-law, Teresa Harriger, said her son in the U.S. Army can enjoy life now "because he knows that his grandpa got guilty. His sister just called him and said 'Just so you know, Grandpa's guilty' and Robby started crying. He said, 'Thank God.'" Source: *WKBW/WIBV*, 1-26-15

Sentenced

Stephen M. Gemme, 45, Northboro, **MA**: 5 years' probation and \$240,000 restitution after pleading guilty to 2 counts of larceny of more

than \$250 by a single scheme. Gemme, former pastor of St. Bernadette Catholic Parish, said he stole from the church and its school from 2008-12 because he was addicted to gambling.

The Diocese of Worcester removed him from ministry in 2013. Source: *Telegram & Gazette*, 2-11-15

Jeremiah L. Behrens, 34, Grandville, **MI**: 20 years on the sex offender registry, probation and restitution to pay for victim counseling after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct with a 15-year-old girl while he was youth pastor at Grandville Baptist Church.

The girl told police Behrens touched her breasts over her clothes when she was 15 and beneath them when she was 16. He admitted touching her thigh and rubbing her lower legs and feet as she sat on his lap. Source: *mlive.com*, 1-29-15

Erik Tvrdon, Havlickuv Brod, **Czech Republic**: 5 years in prison for rape and sexual abuse involving 4 women and a 13-year-old girl. A court spokesperson said the prosecutor has appealed the sentence and wants the court to impose a harsher one. Source: *AP*, 2-26-15

Mark W. Lewis, 40, Vacaville, **CA**: 8 years in prison after pleading no contest to stalking and arson 3 days into his trial. Lewis, pastor at Fellowship Baptist Church, was accused of incidents involving his former girlfriend.

A Snapple bottle filled with flammable liquid was thrown through a window at the woman's home in January 2014 while 6 people were asleep inside. No one was injured and damage was minor. Testimony and court documents showed Lewis wanted revenge because the woman had ended their relationship. Source: *KCRA*, 2-24-15

John Calnan, 76, Cork, **Ireland**: 1 year in jail after pleading guilty to indecent assault. The charge stemmed from an incident on an undetermined date in the mid-1970s when Calnan, a Catholic priest, lured a preteen girl into his car after asking for directions.

Detective Maurice Shanley recounted to the court the girl's statement about what happened: "[Calnan] asked if she was ticklish. He then caught her, her back to him, and put his right hand inside her panties and put his finger inside her vagina. She could not say how long this went on. She could not say if he was aroused."

Shanley told the court Calnan had 5 previous convictions involving victims of both sexes. Source: *Irish Examiner*, 2-17-15

Markus Q. Bishop, 54, Panama City Beach, **FL**: 12 months' probation for misdemeanor battery. Bishop, pastor of Faith Christian Family Church, was arrested for allegedly giving a 16-year-old girl marijuana to lower her inhibitions about getting in a hot tub at his home, then pursuing her and touching and kissing her against her will.

Charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor and delivery of controlled substance to minor by an adult were dropped in a plea bargain. Source: *News Herald*, 2-13-15

Gerald Clark, 52, Westminster, **CO**: 10 years to life in prison after pleading guilty to sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. His victims were 3 minor women as young as 13 who knew him from 2005-12 when he was pastor at Victory Church and Jericho Ministries International.

A victim testified at sentencing that when she told Clark's wife about the abuse, she allegedly said her husband was prepping them for marriage and his affection was like a father's. Source: *CBS Denver*, 2-8-15

Georg Kerkhoff, 56: 6 years in prison on 25 counts of sexual abuse involving German boys as young as 11, including Kerkhoff's godson and 2 brothers in 2001-07. The Catholic Church in **Germany** transferred the priest to **S. Africa** in 2007 after allegations surfaced.

He's also charged with pedophilia in **S. Africa** in 2010 but was extradited before trial. The Diocese of Aachen is seeking his removal from the priesthood. Source: *Sunday Independent*, 2-8-15

Matthew Taylor, 42, Moreno Valley, **CA**: 30 days in jail, 35 months' supervised release and \$197,000 restitution after pleading guilty to embezzlement and fraud of an elderly person by a caretaker. Taylor, associate minister at First Apostolic Faith Church, stole money and property from an 87-year-old terminal cancer victim with whom he was living in 2011. Source: *Press-Enterprise*, 2-8-15

Eric Dejaeger, 67: 11 years in prison for 32 convictions for child sexual abuse while he was a Catholic priest serving Inuit parishes in Igloodlik, **Nunavut**, in 1978-82. Dejaeger has been in custody since 2011 after being arrested on immigration charges in his home country of Belgium. He was charged in Canada in 1995.

He also faces indecent assault and gross indecency charges alleged to have occurred in Edmonton between 1975-1978 while he was studying at Newman Theological College. Source: *CBC News*, 2-4-15

Velanmarkudiyil J. Christudas, 67, Brick, **NJ**: 2 years' probation on a conviction for criminal sexual conduct. Christudas, a native of India, was a pastor at Visitation Catholic Church. He was convicted of molesting a woman but acquitted of charges of assaulting her 2 children.

The woman has a civil suit pending against the priest, the parish and the Diocese of Trenton. Source: *Asbury Park Press*, 1-31-15

John S. Denham, 73, Adamstown, **Australia**: 13 years in prison on convictions for sexual assaults on at least 57 boys while as a parish priest and teacher at St. Pius X Catholic School between 1968-86. The sentence was added to an earlier one of 6 years, making him first eligible for parole in 2028.

Judge Helen Syme described how Denham targeted students with difficult or disadvantaged backgrounds. "As a result, they became easy prey for the offender, who had to do little to gain their trust."

Syme noted Denham taunted students, once saying about being molested, "If you want to tell someone, tell God."

Syme said Denham had been protected by **Fr. Tom Brennan**, school headmaster, and by **Fr. Ron Picken**, a neighboring parish priest who was "generally present" during assaults when the victims were given alcohol at Picken's residence. Source: *Morning Herald*, 1-23-15

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Six alleged sexual assault victims are suing **Radhames Severino**, **Houston**, pastor of Ministerios del Instituto Biblico Elohim, for incidents between 2002-12. The youngest of the alleged victims, all girls, was 9 at the time.

Severino's then-wife and co-pastor **Rufino Medina Severino** is also a defendant. It's alleged that after the girls told her about the abuse, she advised them not to go into her husband's office alone. He hasn't been criminally charged. Source: *click2houston.com*, 2-23-15

A plaintiff, age 23, is suing **Mohammad A. Saleem**, founder of the Institute of Islamic Education in Elgin, **IL**, for sexual assault. The suit alleges Saleem molested her and 3 other female students and that another student was assaulted at age 11 by a male staffer.

The plaintiff alleges that while she was making photocopies, Saleem pulled her down and held her on his lap, lifting her dress to grope her. "I just looked at the wall or the ceiling and just kept saying, 'This is very uncomfortable,'" she said. After he left, she found something sticky on the black garment beneath her dress. Source: *NY Times*, 2-15-15

Plaintiff's attorney Tahira Khan Merritt has filed suit against **Arapaho Road Baptist Church**, Garland, **TX**, alleging that multiple girls were molested by **Jordan "Jordy" Earls** and his brother, **Josh Earls**, when they worked at the church as music minister and youth minister, respectively.

Merritt's client alleges she was first assaulted as an 8th grader at the church by the brothers. Josh Earls is serving 12 years on child pornography convictions and Jordan Earls is facing a prison sentence on porn counts after pleading guilty. Source: *WFAA*, 2-5-15

Seven men filed suit against the **Chicago Presbytery** and related **Presbyterian groups**, alleging they were molested by pastor **Douglas Mason**, who died in 2004. The presbytery in 2007 settled with 4 other accusers for about \$11 million.

The 2 new suits allege abuse of students from 1982-86 and in the 1990s and say the presbytery ignored warnings Mason was a pedophile. Source: *Chicago Tribune*, 1-23-15

The **Diocese of Rockville Centre, NY**, **St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church** in Greenlawn and **Fr. Gregory Yacyshyn** are defendants in a suit filed by a Long Island woman who alleges Yacyshyn molested her when she was 8.

A 2003 Suffolk County grand jury report documented cover-ups of child sex abuse and heard testimony from 97 witnesses: "Priests committed crimes against children of the Diocese. These crimes were treated as a matter of sin and never reported to law enforcement authorities."

The report continued, "Most children did not report the crimes against them until long after the criminal statute of limitations had lapsed. Those who did were promised help, but received little."

Yacyshyn, ordained in 1998, now works at St. Jude of Mastic Beach. Source: *NBC 4*, 1-21-15

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Archdiocese of El Paso, TX**, settled a suit for undisclosed terms with 2 alleged victims of sexual abuse in El Paso by **Alfonso Madrid**, a Jesuit Catholic priest who died in 1982. The suit uncovered a similar allegation, which was reported in 1968 to Madrid's superior at a San Antonio church.

"It was reported to him that Fr. Madrid had taken a 9-year-old boy from the bingo hall at Our Lady of Guadalupe . . . to the rectory where he sexually abused that little boy," alleged attorney Hal Browne. Source: *Fox 29*, 2-6-15

The **Catholic Diocese of Helena** and the **Ursulines of Western Montana** settled a suit for \$4.45 million with 232 plaintiffs (\$19,181 per victim) who were sexually abused by priests

and nuns from the 1930s to the 1970s at the Ursuline Academy in St. Ignatius.

"[T]he money is the only thing that gives us our recognition, but it's not about the money," said a plaintiff. "It's about [the crimes] being brought to the light." Source: *KECI*, 2-3-15

The Eastern U.S. Province of the Salesian Society settled a suit by several victims of sexual abuse by deceased priest **Innocente Clementi** at Mary Help of Christians Catholic School in East Lake, FL. The school for troubled boys, later a co-ed day school, closed in 2006.

"While at MHC [in 1954], I was sexually abused many times by a priest named Clementi," a retired police officer's statement said. "At the time of the abuse, I believed that he was teaching me about life. He also told me that if I ever told anyone, I would never go to heaven." Source: *Tampa Tribune*, 1-27-15

Finances

The **Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis** filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy to become the 12th U.S. Catholic diocese to file for asset protection from lawsuits by clergy abuse victims.

The archdiocese is facing at least 20 suits with about 100 more pending. The filing shows estimated liabilities of \$50 million to \$100 million and estimated assets of \$10 million to \$50 million.

Attorney Patrick Noaker, whose client's suit alleging abuse by deceased priest **Thomas Stitts** was set for trial Jan. 26, said he was disappointed "the archdiocese chose to file bankruptcy rather than have the facts exposed at trial." The Stitts' case was among 3 set for trial affected by the filing.

Noaker said in a statement, "Bankruptcies do not protect kids. Trials and disclosures help protect kids. The Archdiocese's bankruptcy filing just one week before officials would have to testify in a public court with television cameras is not the conduct of an organization committed to transparency and protecting kids." Source: *Star Tribune/MPR*, 2-2-15

Legal Developments

Victor Barnard, 53, was arrested on a beach in Brazil on a warrant from Pine County, **MN**, for alleged sexual assaults of dozens of girls while acting as their pastor from 2000-09 at River Road Fellowship. Barnard fled to Washington state and then to Brazil in the wake of allegations he kept the girls in a housing area known as Shepherd's Camp.

He faces 59 counts of criminal sexual assault and 1 of unlawful flight to avoid prosecution. Source: *Reuters*, 2-28-15

Fayhan al-Ghamdi, a "celebrity" **Saudi** imam accused of the rape, torture and death of his 5-year-old daughter Lama, was released from custody after serving only a few months. To obtain his release, he paid "blood money" of about \$48,000 to Lama's mother.

Albawaba News reported the judge said: "Blood money and the time the defendant had served in prison since Lama's death suffices as punishment."

Under Islamic law, twice that much would have been paid had Lama been a boy. Source: *The Independent*, 2-4-15

The 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Cincinnati heard oral arguments in an appeal by convicted Ohio Catholic priest **Robert Poandl**. He was sentenced to 90 months in prison in 2013 for taking a 10-year-old boy to W. Virginia for sex in 1991. Poandl claims prosecutors improperly asked jurors to consider emotional factors instead of evidence. Source: *WLWT*, 1-20-15

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to intervene in a case from **Louisiana** in which Rebecca Mayeux alleges she told a priest on 3 occasions during confession that she was molested by a parishioner at age 14 in 2008. Mayeux alleges **Jeff Bayhi**, pastor of Our Lady of the Assumption in Clinton, told her it was her problem and she should "sweep it under the floor and get rid of it."

Mayeux's parents sued Bayhi, the **Baton Rouge Diocese** and **George Charlet Jr.**, their daughter's alleged abuser, in 2009. SCOTUS' denial of cert means the trial judge will be allowed to determine if Mayeux's communications with the priest were actually confessions or if Bayhi had a duty to report the allegations.

The diocese sought to block Mayeux's testimony but the trial judge ruled that the priest-penitent privilege was Mayeux's to break. The state high court agreed. The case is returned to the trial court. Source: *Baton Rouge Advocate*, 1-20-15

Removed / Resigned

James Donaghy, Bangor, **N.Ireland**, was defrocked by the Vatican. He is serving 10 years on sexual assault convictions involving 4 teen boys, including 2 seminarians. The Diocese of Down and Connor suspended him in 2004.

Continued on page 22

Letterbox

Anne Gaylor tribute brought back memories

On the occasion of Anne Gaylor's 88th birthday celebration, here are a few memories of this great lady.

I first met Anne over the phone while I was a member of Women's Counseling Service, a resource for birth control and abortion referral in the early 1970s. She always answered calls with her phone number and joked that she had said it so many times it should be part of her epitaph! She provided hundreds of women with access to abortion options both before and after *Roe v. Wade*. She also was our source for physicians who prescribed contraception at a time when birth control methods for the unmarried were "indecent articles" per Wisconsin state statute. (It turns out I married one of those brave souls five years ago, a lovable guy.)

Anne and I worked the phones together when Dr. Kennan's abortion clinic, Madison's only at the time, was closed by a judge when it was discovered that a client from Minnesota had lied about her age. We called dozens of scheduled patients to help them find alternatives while the clock ticked.

I shall always cherish these memories of Anne's indefatigable service to women who so desperately needed her understanding and persistent support of reproductive rights, a battle we are still fighting today. Happy birthday, Anne!

KK Anderson
Wisconsin

Johanson convention speech appreciated

Thank you for printing the full Los Angeles convention address by Dr. Donald Johanson ["Crowd loves Lucy scientific sleuth Johanson," Jan/

Feb15]. I am a new member and was unfortunately unable to attend this year's event. I very much appreciated being able to read his speech, clearly delivered in the voice of a confident and passionate explorer.

It's always wonderful to see someone following reason and evidence wherever they may lead. Thank you for your work,

Noreen Facione
California

Lifetime Membership well worth the wait

Lifetime Membership, what a bargain! No more renewal notices and in only 50 years, I'll have gotten my money back!

Troy Myers
Washington
P.S. I'm 78.

...

I am so happy to finally join FFRF. I've been a fan for many years but was never much of a "joiner." However, I feel it's my duty to support you any way I can. Thank you for everything you do. It's an honor to be a member.

Chris Jansen
Georgia

Explore impact of religion on politics

There are two ideas which I believe would be worthy of pursuing. One is a study on the religious background of our elected officials. The other is the study of the amount of tax income lost through nonprofit deductions for religious institutions.

1. We have a general sense, though not adequate data, about which religions our legislators and Congress persons adhere to. The obvious line of inquiry would also involve how the political parties and religions line up. A more difficult process would be to analyze the level of conservative vs. liberal positions compared to their religions and party affiliation. Perhaps someone searching for a master's or doctoral thesis would find this issue worthy of pursuit. Or maybe someone would want to blog or put up a website or Facebook account to gather this information.

2. More exhaustive, but nonetheless valuable study, would be how many billions of dollars are lost when people and corporations deduct donations to religious institutions. Separating out nonprofit donations for religion vs. other charitable institutions may be difficult, or even impossible, but someone smarter than I am may come up with a useful, if not clever, approach. Or maybe it's just as simple as delving into Internal Revenue Service data.

David Snowden Overby
Iowa

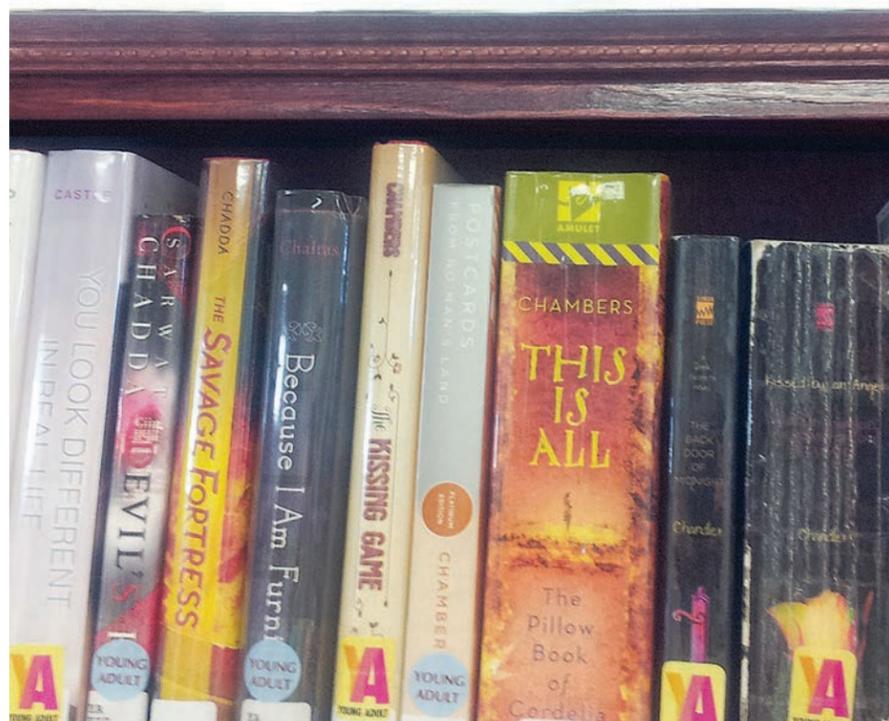
P.S. I heard Dan Barker at the Unitarian church in Dubuque recently. What a talent, musically and intellectually!

Parents hitting children is never OK

[Annie Laurie Gaylor's blog censuring the pope for condoning hitting children] brings back some painful memories. My mother used to tell me that my father loved me very much. Oh no he didn't. His actions spoke louder than her words.

My Jewish father told me that "children are animals you have to beat into

YA FICTION COB - GOD



Get 'em while they're young adults

"Love your newspaper. Reason's Greetings," writes Californian Joel Handen, who spotted this in the Banning Public Library.

shape." I informed him that children are people and people should *never* be hurt. He abused me physically until I was 14, and his sexually inappropriate behavior continued until I left his house at 18. When I had the nerve to disagree with him when I was 35, he refused to talk to me for 15 years and tried to prevent me from talking to my mother.

I made a conscious decision to raise my son differently and without fear of abuse. It was difficult, but I would stop and ask myself, what would my parents do? The opposite was the appropriate thing to do. My parents visited and were dumbfounded that I could negotiate with my 2-year-old son.

My son now has two children and *never* raises a hand, no matter how angry he becomes. I am very close to my grandbabies, my parents are both dead, and I'm left with the painful memories of a monster who took pleasure in giving me pain.

But I have broken the cycle of violence. People need to make that conscious decision.

Myra Lemson, Life Member
Washington

Texas' secular roots under religious attack

With *so* many of FFRF's complaints coming from "the great state" of Texas, I thought I would share this. This week, Texans are celebrating the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence [March 2, 1836], but have any of them read the document? It's short and takes about five minutes.

The document describes the army and the church as "both the eternal enemies of civil liberty, the everready minions of power, and the usual instruments of tyrants." It also bemoans the fact that "moderation is at length so far lost by those in power."

And, it condemns the attempt to establish a national religion: "It denies us the right of worshipping the Almighty according to the dictates of our own conscience, by the support of a national religion, calculated to promote the temporal interest of its human functionaries."

Pretty cheeky Texans back in the day. My, how times have changed.

Lori Olson
Texas

Vision impaired but mind fully functional

My vision's very poor and my hands arthritic so I'll not write much. I thought you might be interested in this from our Sunday paper [a story about persistent safety code violations at a Cape Coral religious facility]. I love your paper when I can read it.

Margaret C. Smith
Florida

Readers take issue with words and image

I was dismayed to read in the Jan/Feb issue that FFRF members are leaving inserts in hotel bibles bearing a message that begins "To whomever opens this bible." The idea is great; it's the grammar that dismays. As the subject of the clause "___ opens this bible," the pronoun should be "whoever," not "whomever." The fact that the clause functions as the object of the preposition "to" has no bearing on the case of the pronoun.

On a related note, the crank mail carries a "parental warning" about "obscene, schatological and sexually graphic language." While I could make a plea for an Oxford comma here, I'm more interested in the curious word "schatological," which appears in no dictionary. In light of the topics addressed in some of the crank mail, either "scatological" or "eschatological" might be appropriate, but they mean very different things. I suggest that whoever wrote the warning look up both words.

Julian Hook
Indiana

Editor's note: Good points, although newspaper style (almost universally) dispenses with the serial comma. Proofreader Dan Barker's note: I take full responsibility for this hurried "correction" to the editor's good work.

...

I am a Lifetime Member and annual contributor and support wholeheartedly your efforts to protect the rights of nonbelievers like me and believers of all religions. However, I found the cartoon on page 4 of your January-February issue to be a jarring departure from the publication's usual tone: specifically the depiction of an Islamic radical as such an ugly caricature with

Og transubstantiation fat

Brim's snacks, made in Bartlett, Tenn., are sinfully good, according to Dan Jacobson, California. (Dan: Next time, send us a bag that's not empty!)

arguably racist features.

Otherwise, keep up the good work.

Tom Hays
California

Law doesn't apply to clergy sex abusers

Every issue I read the black collar crime with horror, anger and dread. It's finally happened: you reported the defrocking of a priest I knew!

I knew "Father Patrick" [name changed] when in the 1990s. He used to come into the gay bar in full clerical garb, and knowing me as the "out" gay atheist in town, delighted in bragging about having sex with underage parishioners in two cities. I told him if he was ever arrested, I'd be the first to testify against him.

He bragged that it would never happen as he had "the goods" on too many of his superiors in the Catholic clergy. My local pharmacy manager, knowing I was simpatico, confessed that his high school son had been molested. The number of victims in the rather small diocese soon equaled those of the far larger archdiocese.

The response of the bishop to the victims and their parents who had formed a local chapter of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests? He threatened them with excommunication and effectively silenced them. Regilding the cathedral bell tower spire was more important.

Now I read that "Father Patrick," although defrocked, is free. And to my knowledge, none of the other "Father Patricks" or the bishop have ever been charged with crimes. Former Boston Archbishop Bernard Law? Now a cardinal, safely retired to the Vatican.

There ought to be a law! Oh, wait, there is a law. It obviously does not apply to clergy.

Alexander Wallace
California

'Good' really not the word for this book

The "Good" Book?

All the way, from the biblical flood to the ominous atrocities promised in the prophecies: blood and more blood! From the firestorm horror of Sodom and Gomorrah to the Passover annihilations and Joshua's passionate extermination, genocide is identified as the principal imperative in the biblical narrative.

JB Kennedy
California

Texas Witnesses worst prison proselytizers

I worked many years in the prison system, and of all religious sects, Jehovah's Witnesses were by far the worst offenders for conning and wheedling their way into women's facilities. All they needed was to convince just one inmate to say "yes" to their visitations and they were in the door.

Women Witnesses were not considered competent enough to "bring the word" through the prison doors. They were required to have a male escort. Each inmate was told over and over again that God could not and would not forgive them until they were "cleansed" from all sin.

These "good preachers" had absolutely no qualms about finding a dark corner to teach said inmate the way back to God's heart, using particular

For Our Town From Our Town

Volume 22 No 2 February 20, 2015



100 Years Young

Marge Eliason of Northford recently celebrated her 100th birthday. A party was hosted by her children Linda Kos and Leslie Eliason and his wife Carolyn. She celebrated with her husband Alton. The two have been married for 78 years. Their legacy includes 5 grand children, 12 great grand children and one great great grand child.

Happy hundredth, Marge!

Marge and Alton Eliason, Connecticut, have been married 78 years, notes the Totoket Times. Alton, a kid of 98, shares a Feb. 12 birthday with Charles Darwin.

body parts to make that woman clean enough for God to forgive. Trust me, they did not ever take responsibility for the fruits of their behaviors.

Jeanne Owers
Texas

For Freethought Today

They will tell you what clothing you must wear,
what foods you may eat,
what work women may not do,
when you must pray to their gods,
when and with whom you may make love,
and how the world is and came to be,
If you let them.

Richard Kirschman
California

Invocations accentuate secular positives

In my opinion, we humanists do not have to use invocation time at a council meeting to explain secular human-

ism and give a lecture. We would make a better impression, and make more progress for our cause, if we can give an invocation that has a spiritual overtone to it. This is a one that I give:

May we have good health;
May we have work to do;
May we find joy in simple things.

May we have a mind that reasons,
A tongue for truth,
An eye for beauty,
A heart that loves,
And sympathy that understands.

May we have neither malice nor envy
But a true kindness
And a noble common sense.

And at the close of each day
May we come together with family and friends,
And find contentment and peace.
So be it.

Theodore M. Utchen
Illinois

Sharing the Crank Mail

A sampling of FFRF's voluminous fan mail, printed as received.

Freedom: You people need to stay out of West Virginia with your evil ways! You people will burn in Hell if you don't change your ways and repent to Jesus Christ! — *Bernard Rice, Madison, W.Va.*

Amendment I: It does NOT mean any other than the government shall not establish a state religion such as in England you stupid jackasses. I'm so sick of you leftist assholes fucking up my country. Eat a sack of dog shit. If you don't have any, let me know, I'll be happy to harvest some for you. — *Dave B*

Proof that God does not exist: I want documentation within 24 hours or I know that your statements are a joke and organization is a joke. — *Jack Christian, Jerusalem*

Your web site: Why don't you stop trying to rewrite history, and why don't you stop trying to destroy our nation. Why not try Egypt Syria, Iraq, Iran, or some other Arab nation. You would be put to death by some extremist. You ought to be thankful for Christian teaching in America. Take it away, and all you have left is humanism, and look where that is taking us. Wake up. — *Kim Alexander*

Fruit cakes: How can a handful of nutjobs try and change a great nation. You are all assholes! Get out of this country or give us your names so we can publish them in the press. You guys hide behind a website and an ungodly agenda like the Isis murderers do behind cloth. — *Egon Spangler*

pathetic: Your intolerance is really something akin to communism, are you communist? Please respond, this is not a rhetorical question. Jesus is Lord, every knee will bow and every tongue confess. — *jon coville*

Help me: All I want is for you to get the networks to stop mentioning Valentine's Day and for places like McDonald's, Dunkin Donuts, Verizon not to promote that holiday. It is the only public holiday that is fully christian (it's based on a saint). Those networks, and companies would never promote muslim things why let them promote a catholic thing about a SAINT?? Please help me. Work with me. — *Crystal Habib*

What's up: Just wondering who you are both-

ering now with your faggoty. In other words, fuck-off!!! — *Jerry Babbitt, California*

Why: I am curious why you have to be greedy and rely on pride and self control to tear families and communities apart because your group has a very small purpose to become rich and famous with no direction in life. — *anonymous*

Attests are cool: Can u imagine if your wrong how long eternity is. Lmao y'all ass gonna be smoking down there beside hitler. You Yankees are hilarious. I jet your all for being queer though and playing with each other ball sacks. Hahahha anyway I own a company and don't give 2shits who sues me. I fire atheists or give them jobs like cleaning toilets. — *Brent Mckee, Freeport, Texas*

Fleckless fools: Oh you free thinkers are nepharious fools! Real free thinkers would understand that this country was founded with a religious foundation that gives appalling nihilistic individuals as you to do as you would like. Red, white blue or green devils, you are the antithesis of evil. Many in the mid east would welcome you. Go see, please! May God have mercy on your souls. — *God Bless America*

You are misinformed: First of all WHERE IN THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION DOES IT SAY A (SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE)? IT DOESN'T. WHICH MAKE YOU A PREVARICATOR, AND ANOTHER LIBERAL MORAN. — *Joe Smiktr*

What a shame: So the police chief in Searcy AR told you degenerate idiots to go pound sand!!! Good for him!!! Plus your group is nothing but a bunch of sub-human degenerates on the same level of pedophiles and abortionists!! Just because you don't believe in God does not give you the right to tell us believers that we can't!! Or that we can't have Christian symbols on government property!! — *John Ammonett*

mind your own business: When a city or county wants to put up a Manger at CHRISTMAS time in view of the public, it is none of your business. If a school classroom 3 states away chooses to say a prayer on school grounds before the school day starts, it is of no concern to you. This country was built on the belief of GOD. If u cant handle it, tough crap. Thank you and may GOD bless you. — *Christopher Rowe, Indiana*



So why bother?

So true, writes James Asa. "I had to laugh when I saw this in Winthrop, Wash. I wish they would let me give the sermon."



Texas activist

Sally Chizek, San Antonio FFRF member and activist, is pictured at the Texas Secular Convention with Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. The conference started with a rally at the Texas Capitol and included national and regional speakers, such as Annie Laurie, Barry Lynn of Americans United, Ron Lindsay of Center for Inquiry and Kelly Damerow, a lobbyist with the Secular Coalition for America. Sally is a longtime activist with FACT, Freethinkers Association of Central Texas, and worked closely with the late Catherine Fahringer, who ran FFRF's San Antonio chapter.

Generous benefactor

Lifetime Member Brian Bolton, who personally underwrites FFRF's annual essay competition for graduate students and for whom its new executive wing is named, traveled to the first-ever Texas Secular Convention in Austin on Feb. 28 for a surprise meeting with Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, a convention speaker. "Although after two decades of correspondence, phone calls and Freethought Today articles, I felt I knew Brian, it was such a pleasure to meet in person one of FFRF's kindest and most generous benefactors," said Annie Laurie.



GR8 plate

Anthony Magnabosco, San Antonio FFRF member, enjoyed sharing his new license plate at the Austin convention.

Johnson documents secular lives



Chris Johnson (Photo by Ingrid Laas)

Continued from page 17

You also might recognize A.C. Grayling here. He talked a little bit about the finite nature of life. [Grayling interview clip]

Another person you'll recognize is a friend of FFRF, actor and comedian Julia Sweeney, here with her daughter Mulan. One thing we talked about was being an atheist and dealing with the issue of death and dying. [interview clip]

I love her statement about people



From *A Better Life*: Chris Johnson's portrait of comedian and playwright Julia Sweeney, with her daughter Mulan.

being like wildflowers in a field, growing and dying. It takes me back to the one-third of that C.S. Lewis quote that I actually agree with, which is, we only have each other in the world, right? We only have one another, that's all there is. And that's OK.

The relationships we form with others are precious and they're wonderful. That's not because of the sanction of some entity, but from the fact that we, together, have come to create these experiences and form these bonds and relationships ourselves. That's incredible. That's really beautiful, when you think about it.

All these clips, by the way, [came

from] when I took photos for the book. I filmed the interviews. Now I've been spending months sitting in my apartment growing a beard and editing away. I've been going through the 50-plus hours of footage I have of everybody talking about this stuff, and now I'm turning it into a documentary version.

I know there are other people here who are in the book and would be happy to sign their pages. Before I leave, I just want to show you a brief promo for the film version of *A Better Life*. [clip]

Thank you for having me.

ANNIE LAURIE GAYLOR: We have time for one or two questions for Chris.

Q. Did you ask Alex if he has a fear of death, or why he does what he does?

A. You'd probably learn more about

that in the "60 Minutes" piece. Mostly he talks about how free soloing is just another type of climbing, how exhilarating it is and just a different technique, rather than thinking about the death part of it. He doesn't really [fear death], as far as I know. I don't think he thinks about it that much.

Q. I'm from the Twin Cities. My community is just kind of burgeoning as far as a secular community, so I know about 300 to 400 atheists, some of them not so well. It's kind of amazing . . . how we're still considered evil and strange. Your book and documentary are good efforts to show that we're regular people. We're becoming more mainstream, and yet you never know where we'll get negative feedback. This presentation got me thinking about that.

A. Thank you, yes. There's an interesting story here as well; thank you for reminding me. A personal connection that I have with FFRF — my stepmother, my mom's partner — is from the U.K. and was becoming a U.S. citizen. She's a 65-year-old British woman, and they asked her on the form if she would bear arms to protect the United States. She's a pacifist, and she said "no."

They said, "Well, are you religious?" and she said "no." Then they said, "Well, you can't be a conscientious objector unless you have a religious basis." She emailed me and asked, "Do you know anyone I can talk to about what's going on?" I said, "Do I know anyone?" So I contacted FFRF and Andrew [Seidel] did a wonderful job writing letters and helping, and they eventually gave in. She was able to become a U.S. citizen.

Black Collar crimes

Continued from page 19

Donaghy allegedly told a victim in 1989 that he could get the boy's dead grandfather into heaven while molesting the boy. Source: *BBC/Irish Central*, 2-21-15

Louis J. Kolenkiewicz, 47, pastor of St. Bede the Venerable Parish in Holland, PA, was put on administrative leave by the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia "in an abundance of caution," said Archbishop Charles Chaput.

Kolenkiewicz is alleged to have violated boundaries of appropriate behavior for interacting with children and young people. He was put on leave from 2011-2014 while earlier allegations were reviewed, but new information has surfaced. Source: *The Inquirer*, 2-16-15

Meir Shlomo Kluwgant, Australia's most senior rabbi and president of the Organisation of Rabbis of Australasia, resigned days after appearing before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Victims said Kluwgant's position was unten-

able after comments he made about the father of 3 victims. Zephaniah Waks told the commission about being ostracized by religious leaders after speaking out in Melbourne about abuse in a Chabad yeshiva.

As Waks was testifying, Kluwgant sent messages to the editor of the Australian Jewish News: "Zephaniah is killing us. He is a lunatic on the fringe, guilty of neglect of his own children. Where was he when all this was happening?" Source: *The Guardian*, 2-15-15

Australian Rabbi Yosef Feldman resigned as director of an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva in Sydney in the wake of public outcry over his comments that courts should be lenient to pedophiles who no longer molest. Feldman also told the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse regarding a 2002 incident at the school that he didn't know it could be a crime for an adult to touch a child's genitals. Source: *Haaretz*, 2-11-15

The Catholic Archdiocese of Boston placed

Thomas M. Gillespie, pastor at St. Theresa of Lisieux Parish, North Reading, MA, on leave due to a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor in the 1970s. Source: *CBS Boston*, 2-8-15

The Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport, CT, suspended Stephen DeLuca as priest in residence at St. Catherine of Siena Church in Riverside due to an accusation of child sexual abuse 3 decades ago. DeLuca resigned in June as chaplain at Greenwich Hospital.

Bishop Frank Caggiano said in a statement that the diocese has reached out to the alleged victim and "offered assistance to promote healing." Source: *greenwichtime.com*, 2-6-15

Peter Kihm was suspended and removed as pastor at Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Rhinebeck, NY, due to a credible allegation of sexual abuse of a minor about 30 years ago. Information has been given to the Dutchess County District Attorney's Office. Source: *Poughkeepsie Journal*, 1-29-15

Pope Francis has defrocked Howard

Fitzgerald, 63, who worked at Catholic parishes in Iowa for the last 35 years. A diocesan review committee found Fitzgerald molested a minor in a "decades-old incident."

He's the 5th priest in the Des Moines Diocese to face laicization for sexual misconduct since 2003. Source: *KCCI*, 1-22-15

Paul Moudry resigned as pastor of St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church in Golden Valley, MN. He's been on voluntary leave since November 2013 during a probe of "prior misconduct which occurred many years ago" with adults in allegedly non-illegal activities.

Jennifer Haselberger, former chancellor for canonical affairs for the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, said Moudry's file also mentions a leave of absence he took from the St. Paul Seminary in the early 1980s because of sexual behavior and a 1991 evaluation at St. Luke Institute, a treatment facility for clergy sex abusers. Source: *MPR*, 1-20-15

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

‘Saved’ as a toddler, ‘escaped’ in bible college

This is an edited version of Brandon Frederick's "deconversion story" posted in April 2014 on the website of *Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics @ UW-Madison*.

By Brandon Frederick

I came into this world in Wisconsin as the child of evangelicals and then became an atheist after almost four years of bible college. My father, among other side occupations such as church directory photography, is a pastor and my mother a worship leader.

They worry about hellfire and want to save me from such a fate, perceiving the best way to do this is to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

Growing up, I was kept apart from non-Christians and surrounded with bibles, religious conversation, prayers, worship songs, morning devotions and bible-based storybooks and videos. I accepted Jesus as Lord when I was 3 or 4 at the prompting of my mother at bedtime one night.

I was home-schooled for almost my entire K-12 years. My mom taught most of my classes, but my dad usually taught bible and gym. I learned to read very well since I had so much time to devote to it, but my science, writing and math education was dismal and self-taught after middle school.

When I was 12, my mom found porn links on the family computer's Internet history and discovered my growing interest in female anatomy. The shame I felt was crippling. Dad took me out for a smoothie and a "man-to-man" talk on how sex and lust were sinful until after marriage. (I didn't discover masturbation till I was 16. This started a cycle of repression, guilt and self-hatred for having sexual desires.)

Another event that brought more religious zeal was our move to Kansas City, Mo., not long after my Internet porn was found. I joined the quasi-cult International House of Prayer. If you have ever seen the documentaries "Jesus Camp" or "God Loves Uganda," that's IHOP. I responded at age 13 in 2001 to [homophobic pastor] Lou Engle's altar call to be a gospel messenger during the End Times.

I was very involved in IHOP before and after school. I studied my barebones curriculum rigorously, even in

the summer, and wound up getting a high school diploma from my parents when I was 16 so I could enter the Forerunner School of Ministry [now IHOP University, in Grandview, Mo.] to major in "apostolic preaching."

We picketed an adult film store with blue purity blindfolds over our eyes and protested at Planned Parenthood with red "Life" tape over our mouths. I evangelized at Haunted Houses with a clipboard of fake survey questions and rocked back and forth while speaking in "tongues" for hours at a time.

When I felt like some recreation and watched a movie or played a game at a friend's house, I would feel enormously guilty. But the guilt for gaming paled next to the shame I felt whenever I had a sexual thought. Every time I "fell" I would weep miserably into my pillow and beg for God's forgiveness.

To "fix" myself, I confessed to my dad or bible college friends and prayed for strength to overcome temptation. None of it helped but I stayed committed to improving myself and becoming more like Jesus. I planned to become an electrician after graduation rather than a full-time minister. I would donate large amounts of my income to IHOP and to charity.

‘My mom wept profusely and my dad was angry and shocked.’

Then came broadband Internet. Its superior speed and constant connection gave me access to atheists, Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims in my house. I began to devour everything from nutrition to history to bible to philosophy.

Bible college dropout

Over winter break in January 2008, I stumbled on some quotes by Mark Twain and found myself curious as to why this popular fiction author that I read as a child was a religious skeptic. I soon discovered that many heroes and intellectuals like Thomas Jefferson had serious reservations about Christianity. I discovered all the major criticisms of Christianity (problem of evil, bible contradictions, age of the Earth, evolution, tyranny of hell, inadequacy of faith healing,) and the secular support for a naturalistic worldview. I want to thank Richard Carrier, John Loftus, Dan Barker, Ken Daniels and countless other secular authors who helped me on my journey.

I decided to read Christian apologists like William Lane Craig and C.S. Lewis 50% of the time and secular authors 50% of the time. I also prayed fervently that God would give me some amazing supernatural encounter so that I would not doubt, but all I heard was silence and my own thoughts.

I decided to drop out of bible college in my final semester and was aggressively interrogat-



Brandon and his fiancée Amanda at Mount Bonnell near Austin, Texas.

ed about why I was leaving. One leader seemed convinced that I was having sex with older men (as if doubts about my faith and homosexuality were linked), despite always being very straight. Another hammered me with accusations that I was just being arrogant and needed to be humble and accept their higher knowledge without proof.

As I read more, I started to realize that I'd been part of a quasi-cult of a few thousand people, with influences on tens of thousands more worldwide. Coming out was hardest with my family. My mom wept profusely and my dad was angry and shocked. My brother yelled that he couldn't understand how I could be so blind. I wanted to reply that I was not the closed-minded one, since I was reading Christian and secular authors equally, while he had read little but the bible his whole life. But I bit my tongue.

A Sterling friend

The one bright spot was my best friend Sterling. It turned out that he had deconverted from Christianity nine months earlier but was too frightened of my religious zeal to tell me. We started to have coffee daily and poured out our hearts about the frustration with family who didn't understand, the humorous things we used to believe, unanswered questions in science and philosophy and where we were going with our lives now that we seemed to be done with IHOP and Christendom.

He gave me strength when no one else would.

I later found other intellectual non-theistic friends, but almost everyone in my life caused me pain. Rather than understand me, they tried to reconvert me or accuse me of arrogance or homosexuality or being blind to the truth.

I encourage anyone reading this to be supportive and available to those who question their faith. Also, do not count anyone out. Plenty of pastors like Dan Barker and Jerry DeWitt have deconverted later in life, so almost no one is too far gone to have an intelligent conversation with.

Epilogue

I moved to Wisconsin to get away from the religious zeal of my family and church members. I joined the National Guard because I had no idea how I was going to pay for college and went on to get a bachelor's in business administration from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I am now far happier and whole, intellectually and emotionally, than ever before (rather than empty as most Christians suppose godless heathens are).

We are often told that atheists have this huge void in our hearts that can only be filled with God. I am often asked if I am afraid of being wrong and going to hell. I reply that I am not any more afraid of Christian hell than they are of the hells of other religions.

FFRF complaints

Continued from page 14

Violation: The department partners with Law Enforcement Chaplaincy Sacramento.

Contact: Mid-Del Public School District, Oklahoma City

Violation: The Epperly Heights Elementary School principal regularly discusses God and Jesus with students.

Contact: Pinellas County Schools, Fla.

Violation: The district allows a religious ministry into middle and high schools to teach an abstinence-only program.

Contact: Chicago Public Schools

Violation: A Greeley Elementary teacher promotes WyldLife, a Christian club dedicated to "introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith."

Contact: U.S. Postal Service, Mount Pleasant, Texas

Violation: "In God We Trust" was displayed on the post office's wall.

Contact: Dayton Bureau of Motor Vehicles, Ohio

Violation: The BMV lobby displays signs containing "God Bless the USA" and "One Nation Under God."

Contact: City of Bayard, N.M.

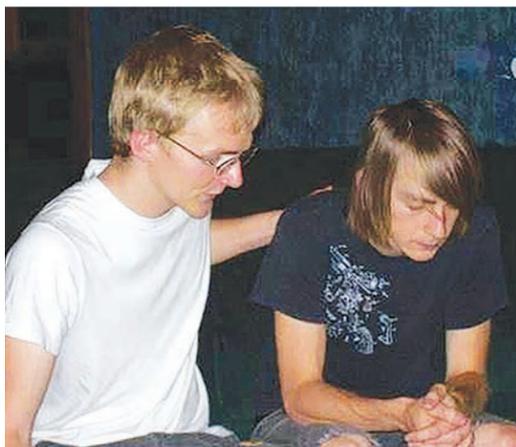
Violation: City offices close on Good Friday and Easter Monday.

Contact: National Park Service

Violation: A Latin cross is displayed atop Castle Rock in Modoc County, Calif.

Contact: Julesburg School District RE-1, Colo.

Violation: Julesburg High School graduation ceremonies include prayer.



Brandon Frederick captions this 2007 scene: "Me praying for a friend who confessed a sin (masturbation)."

Tempus fugit Time on pilot's hands put to good use

By Robert Turner

I am a proud member of FFRF. I currently live in Ohio but am in the process of moving to Burlington, Vt. I was born in the San Francisco Bay area but my family moved around, my father being in the airline business.

Both my parents are deceased, but I have two sisters, who live in the Midwest, and a son, who is a software engineer, currently living in Vermont. I am a pilot flying for a major airline and have been a professional pilot for 28 years. I learned to fly when I was 17 and had my private license while I was still in high school (yes, I took my friends flying then, unbeknownst to their parents!).

As a pilot, I moved around a lot through my career and have lived in New Mexico, Wyoming, Denver, Houston, Guam, Ohio and points in between. I truly enjoy what I do, though the life of a pilot does have its challenges.

One of my longtime hobbies is woodworking. I find a lot of solace there, and sawdust. Once while in college, I took a three-dimensional design class and learned of these lovely wooden-gear clocks. I thought it would be something to be able to make one some day.

Many of my early woodworking projects were born through the expertise of Norm Abram and his show "The New Yankee Workshop." I loved that show and his simple but expert way of crafting wood into nice pieces of furniture. I have built, and given away, many of his various projects.

After years of crooked tables and split door panels, I finally figured out how to create a decent little piece of furniture and musical instruments like autoharps, Irish flutes and cigar-box guitars. Along with woodworking, I also learned to repair old cuckoo clocks and mantle clocks. Why not merge hobbies? Why not get around to building wooden-gear clocks?

I built a few before deciding to build one for FFRF. I wanted to add something special to the new Freethought

Hall. I wanted to put my own hands into something that could add a little joy or solace to members' lives. I wanted members to be reminded that they are not alone.

I admire people throughout history who were not one-dimensional, someone like Ben Franklin. He was a businessman, writer, inventor and statesman who bucked convention. He also had a sense of humor. One of my favorite quotes of his is: "I conceive that miseries of mankind are brought upon them by false estimates they have made of the value of things."

A few of my favorite things are ukulele music, pizza (any kind), time spent with loved ones, learning that your kid knows more than you about something, finishing a project, listening to Penn Jillette on his "Penn's Sunday School" podcast, pulling a jet skyward on a sunny morning.

My least favorite things are auto-correct, moving, time away from loved ones, learning that your kid knows more than you about something, finishing a project, pulling a jet skyward during a blizzard.

I have been skeptical about religion for as long as I can remember. My mother tried to drag us to church in the beginning, but even as a child it felt wrong. It didn't make sense. My religious friends seemed a little nutty. They all disagreed with each other — Mormons, Catholics, fundamentalists. Nothing made sense to me except natural science and history.

As a young man, I was approached while in college by hard-sell, born-again Christians. They seem like used car salesmen to me. They feed on the insecure and impressionable. I saw one of my teenage sisters and the sister of my spouse get sucked in at that vulnerable age. I saw how their lives were ruined, their young hopes of education and a reasonable income destroyed for poverty and ignorance and disdain for various other groups of people. Thankfully, my sister saw the light a decade later, finally achieving her Ph.D. as she joined the world of the rational.

These churches are cults by every definition, no matter how large. One of the most impressionable moments I had confirming myself as an atheist



Bob Turner, sporting a vacation beard, calls this his Ernest Hemingway look.

came when a respected mentor, an old and religious pilot, told me that on his mother's deathbed he told her that if she didn't accept Jesus as her savior, she was going to hell. Fine son, indeed!

I spend a lot of time in hotel rooms. If you do too, take the bible out. If you don't see an FFRF sticker in it (that I may have put there) please put one in yourself, or put the book "in far, far better place."

Please stop by Freethought Hall in Madison, say hi to Dan and take a look at my little clock. Take a look at the scroll-sawn gears, the maple pegs, the

I wanted members to be reminded that they are not alone.

black walnut frame, the wood taken from an old tree on my friend's land on Johnson's Island, Ohio.

Listen to the soothing tick of wood on wood. It's there for you to enjoy.

FFRF Building Fund wraps up — thank you to all!

The Freedom From Religion Foundation extends gratitude to the 1,282 members who donated to its capital campaign (as of March 6) to add a four-story addition to its offices in Freethought Hall in downtown Madison, Wis. FFRF also acknowledges the wonderful help of longtime members in generally keeping FFRF going and growing, as well as bequests, small and major, that also made the expansion possible.

It will provide room for the current staff of 15, plus room to expand, to better serve membership, which is now over 21,500 strong.

Phase I (the addition, including a 900-square-foot library and auditorium) is complete. Phase II, the renovation of the original 1855 office building, will continue until summer. The opening and grand opening dates are to be announced.

Photos of the first event in the Char-



lie Brooks Auditorium are on pages 12-13. Future issues will report on finishing touches.

Tour hours will be set up during FFRF's national convention this year in Madison. Members may

also make private reservations when they are in town to tour the "reborn" Freethought Hall.

A book containing the name of every donor is being completed and will soon be on display in the Anne Nicol Gaylor Lobby.

Below is a final report of donations received from Feb. 3 to March 4. It's not cumulative, except for the total:

Anonymous, West Virginia, \$54.00
Anonymous, Oregon, \$50.00
Aron Weiner, Michigan, \$40.00
Alice M Kachman, Michigan, \$20.00
Anonymous, Virginia, \$10.00
Subtotal: \$174

New Cumulative Total: \$2,030,118.12



Katie Daniel alongside Bob Turner's beautifully crafted clock in FFRF's new third-floor Harold Erickson Public Relations Wing. Bookkeeper Katie was a short-timer on the occasion, it being her last day with FFRF as she is moving to accept another position out of state. (Photo by Lauryn Seering)

Mark your calendar!

38th Annual National Convention - 2015

Weekend of October 9-11, 2015

Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center
1 John Nolen Drive
Madison, Wisconsin

Tour expanded Freethought Hall Friday morning. Tour Frank Lloyd Wright convention center Friday afternoon, enjoy appetizers, workshops. Formal program begins 7 p.m Friday continuing all-day Saturday.