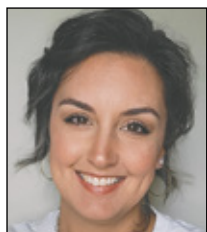


# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**After nine years,  
anonymous mom  
goes public**

PAGE 10



**30,000 days to  
count your  
lucky stars**

PAGE 11



**Winners of  
essay contest for  
BIPOC students**

PAGES 12-17

Vol. 40 No. 7

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September 2023

## Oklahoma lawsuit FFRF, 3 other groups challenge religious public charter school

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is part of a coalition of groups representing nine Oklahoma residents and a pro-public school nonprofit that filed a lawsuit Aug. 1 in Oklahoma state court challenging the nation's first religious public charter school.

Joining FFRF in the coalition are Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Education Law Center, which represent the plaintiffs in *OKPLAC Inc. v. Statewide Virtual Charter School Board*.

The plaintiffs are faith leaders, public school parents and public education advocates who object to their tax dollars funding a public charter school that will discriminate against students and families based on their religion and LGBTQ-plus status, fail to adequately serve students with

disabilities, and indoctrinate students into one religion — all in violation of Oklahoma law and our country's promises of the separation of church and state and public schools that are open to all.

The lawsuit demonstrates that the Oklahoma Statewide Virtual Charter School Board violated the Oklahoma Constitution, the Oklahoma Charter Schools Act and the board's own regulations when it approved St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Vir-

tual School's application for charter-school sponsorship on June 5. Reasons that the application was unlawful include:

- St. Isidore plans to discriminate in its policies and practices based on religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and other protected characteristics. Students

See Oklahoma on page 8

**“This attack on our secular  
public education system  
cannot go unchallenged.”**

— Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF  
co-president

### Little Free(thinking) Libraries



Greg Uhl, nephew of the late Diane and Stephen Uhl, major FFRF benefactors, purchased several copies of Elle Harris' book and “seeded” several little free libraries in his North Carolina community with her book *Elle the Humanist* and Stephen's book, *Out of God's Closet*.

“I can't think of a better way to help continue Uncle Steve and Aunt Diane's message of friendly atheism,” Greg writes. He presented Elle with the debut \$5,000 Stephen and Diane Uhl “Out of God's Closet” student activist scholarship last year.

## FFRF columnist James Haught was skillful writer

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is saddened to inform our members that FFRF columnist James A. Haught, 91, died on July 23 after a recurrence of cancer.



James A. Haught

“Jim was an adept writer — sending us fresh columns until the end — and a delight to work with,” noted FFRF Communications Director Amit Pal. He wrote more than 150 columns for FFRF, many of which ran in *Freethought Today*, and all of which are available on *FreethoughtNow.org*.

In April 2020, at age 88, Jim wrote about his impending death:

“I have no dread. Why worry about the inescapable, the utterly unavoidable, the sure destiny of today's 7 billion? However, sometimes I feel annoyed because I will have no choice. I'm accustomed to choosing whatever course I want, but I won't get to decide whether to take my final step. Damn!”

“I have no supernatural beliefs. I don't expect to

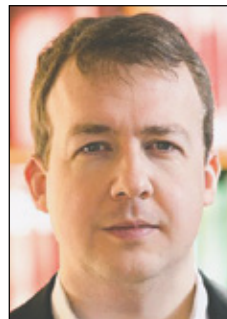
See Haught on page 2

## FFRF takes legal action to preserve Supreme Court win

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has taken legal action to preserve its 2018 New Jersey Supreme Court win that halted unconstitutional official funding of church repairs.

The state/church watchdog filed a motion on Aug. 11 on behalf of itself and New Jersey taxpayer David Steketee to intervene as a party to a recently filed lawsuit seeking to overturn its court victory ending Morris County's practice of funneling taxpayer money to churches. FFRF secured a unanimous decision from the New Jersey Supreme Court in April 2018 declaring the county's practice of funding church restorations unconstitutional under the Religious Aid Clause of the New Jersey Constitution. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review that decision in March 2019, which should have brought finality to FFRF's legal victory.

However, a new lawsuit, brought by First Liberty Institute (a Christian nationalist outfit) on behalf of two New Jersey churches in the U.S. District Court of New



David Steketee

Jersey, seeks to overturn the New Jersey Supreme Court ruling, arguing that the state's Religious Aid Clause violates the U.S. Constitution's Free Exercise Clause. The two churches are asking a trial court to strike down this provision meant to protect taxpayers from having to fund religious institutions.

“The legal claims being advanced by these churches are identical to arguments already heard and rejected by the New Jersey Supreme Court,” explains FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover. “These plaintiffs are attempting to relitigate the case that FFRF won five years ago, and they're attempting to do it without FFRF's involvement.”

The defendant in the new lawsuit is Morris County, which is put in the position of defending the prior ruling, despite its prior vigorous attempts to overturn it. FFRF's motion to intervene explains why the county's defense of that ruling would be inadequate to protect FFRF's court victory and the rights of all New Jersey taxpayers.

FFRF and its local member David Steketee had filed suit in December 2015 seeking to stop Morris County from issuing further historic preservation grants to

See Court on page 8



# Haught

Continued from page 1

wake up in paradise or Hades, surrounded by angels or demons. That's fairy-tale stuff. I think my personality, my identity — me — is created by my brain, and when the brain dies, so does the psyche. Gone forever into oblivion.

"My journey on the road has been proceeding for eight decades. Actuarial tables make my future so obvious that I can't shut my eyes to it. Life proceeds through stages, and I'm in the last scene of the last act.

"While my clock ticks away, I'll pursue every minute. Carpe diem. Make hay while the sun shines. And then I'm ready for nature's blackout, with no regrets."

Jim was a lifelong reporter/editor/columnist, who spent most of his career working for the Charleston Gazette in a number of capacities. Haught's post-newspaper writing career included serving as a senior editor of Free Inquiry magazine and writer-in-residence for the United Coalition of Reason, along with his prolific freelancing for FFRF.

He was born in Reader, W.Va., and moved to Charleston in 1949 after graduating from high school, working first as a deliveryman for a typewriter company that did business with the two newspapers then operating in Charleston.

Two years later, Haught began working as a typesetter in the Charleston Daily Mail's print shop. In 1953, he volunteered to work in the Daily Mail newsroom on his days off, without pay, to try the writing end of the newspaper business. Within a few months, the Charleston Gazette offered him a job as a reporter, which Haught accepted, despite a \$2 per week cut in pay from his typesetting job.

He worked at the Gazette and Gazette-Mail for the rest of his newspaper career, except for a seven-month hiatus in 1959 when he took a job as a press

For more obituaries, see pages 18 and 19.

aide for Sen. Robert Byrd.

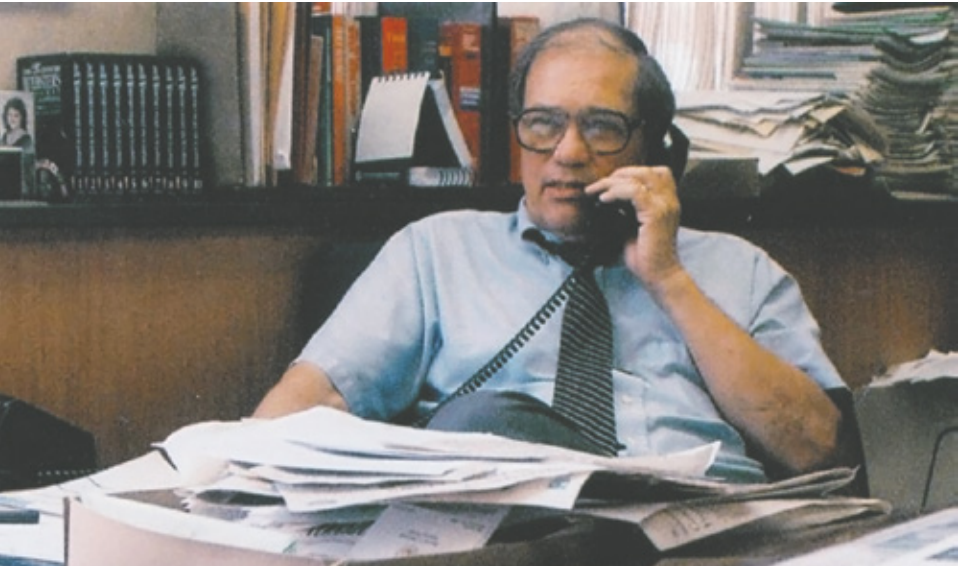
During his time at the Gazette, Haught worked as a police beat reporter, features writer, religion columnist and investigative reporter before being elevated to associate editor in 1983 and editor in chief in 1992. Following the Gazette's merger with the Daily Mail in 2015, Haught served as editor emeritus of the Charleston Gazette-Mail. He continued to contribute to the newspaper's editorial pages into his late 80s.

Haught earned more than 20 national awards for his reporting, editorials and columns. He also was the author of 12 books and more than 100 magazine articles on such topics as religion, religious doubt, science and West Virginia's history, politics and colorful — sometimes criminal — personalities.

In a February column, he wrote of his hope for humanity: "Here's a reason I feel inner peace about my approaching end: Our secular humanist cause has won hundreds of victories during my nine decades, and I have a wishful faith that it will continue to win after I'm gone.

"Now in this 21st century, supernatural Christianity is collapsing rapidly in Western democracies. Intelligent people no longer swallow it. I have hopeful confidence that the struggle to help humanity and wipe out fairy tales will keep on winning, without me."

Haught and his first wife, Nancy, who died in 2008, had four children and 11 grandchildren. In 2013, he married retired teacher Nancy Lince, who died in 2021.



James Haught is shown behind his desk in his editor in chief's office at the Charleston Gazette in this undated photo.

ffrf

FREETHOUGHT  
TODAY

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

# Freethinkers: Send us your seven-word stories!

Dear Freethinkers:  
You did so well with six-word stories earlier this year that you deserve another chance, and one additional word, to strut your stuff. So grab your thinking caps.

The topic: **What, if anything, is your higher power?** Meaning, instead of an Abrahamic god, what gets you through the night, so to speak?

Might Homer Simpson, who changed his name to Max Power in a Season 10 episode, be your guru? Insights don't get much pithier than his toast "To alcohol! The cause of, and solution to, all of life's problems." Deadheads are grateful for Robert Hunter, tie-dye, drums and space.

A seven-word memoir ideally has a beginning, middle and end, but that's tough

in such tight space. Do your best. Compound modifiers (e.g., "first-place" finish, count as two words, contractions as one).

This isn't a contest. Submissions, one per person, will all be printed in the November issue of Freethought Today and online. The deadline to submit is Oct. 9.

To submit, write "Seven-word story" in an email subject line. Include your name and city (optional) and state of residence. Email to [memos@ffrf.org](mailto:memos@ffrf.org) or mail to FFRF, Attn: Bill Dunn, Box 750, Madison, WI 53701.

We are not fabulists (think Aesop) and are not prone to think that if we don't understand something, then God must be behind it. Lazy intellect, get thee behind me!

— Bill Dunn

## Note to members

For those of you who get the PDF version of Freethought Today, there have been a few changes to the content you can see.

Because of privacy concerns — the PDF can be easily forwarded to non-members — FFRF has stopped including in the PDF version the Black Collar Crime report, names of new Lifetime members, and the names of the Letterbox contributors.

The online version at [freethoughttoday.com](http://freethoughttoday.com) also follows this protocol. Only the actual print newspaper contains all of these items.

If you would like to continue reading

Black Collar Crime, see the names of FFRF's newest Lifetime members, or see the names of those who contributed to our Letterbox, you will need to change your preferences in how you receive Freethought Today.

In order to do that, follow these simple steps:

- Log into your [FFRF.org](http://FFRF.org) account.
- Click on "Update your contact information."
- Go down to "Deliver Freethought Today by" and click on either "Newspaper by mail" or "Both PDF and paper copy."
- Click "Submit."

# THEY SAID WHAT?

Education is evangelism. If you don't control education, you cannot control the future — Stalin knew that, Mao knew that, Hitler knew that. We have to get that back for conservative values.

**Liberty University's Senior Vice President of Communications Ryan Helfenbein.**

Twitter, 6-26-23

The 2023 "Barbie" movie, unfortunately, neglects to address any notion of faith or family, and tries to normalize the idea that men and women can't collaborate positively (yuck).

**Ginger Gaetz, married to Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Christian nationalist, critiquing the new feminist movie "Barbie."**

Twitter, 7-25-23

Photo: Instagram

Regardless of what your beliefs are, our society is a Judeo-Christian society, and we have a moral compass. Not everybody does. **Lt. Gen. Richard G. Moore Jr., a three-star Air Force general, speaking about how the U.S. military's approach to artificial intelligence is more ethical than adversaries'.**

Washington Post, 7-22-23

It doesn't matter what the cause is, "what God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" [Matthew 6:19]. I don't even care if the person is a reprobate, and they hate God, and they hate you, and they . . . even if they're, like, an axe murderer, you cannot legally divorce them in the sight of God.

**Christian preacher Duncan Urbanek of Pure Words Baptist Church in Houston during a recorded sermon.**

The Friendly Atheist, 7-24-23

God is so good. He took her by nature, not by any evil deed, bad accident or bad illness. He took her where she was out doing what she loved and that gives us comfort.

**Janet Adamson, the mother of Amie Adamson, who was killed by a grizzly bear on a trail near Yellowstone National Park in July.**

BBC, 7-25-23

It's important that we put full faith and hope in God and not anything that we see in the headlines and not anything that we see happening in the news. . . . God has plans much bigger than this.

**Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, responding to the news that former President Trump has been indicted a third time.**

Huffington Post, 8-2-23]

Don't tell me about no separation of church and state. State is the body. Church is the heart. You take the heart out of the body, the body dies.

**New York Mayor Eric Adams, at an interfaith prayer breakfast.**

New York Times, 7-13-23



# Madison, Wis., Oct. 13-15

## FFRF’s convention is not to be missed!

FFRF’s 46th annual national convention is quickly approaching, and you won’t want to miss it!

The event will take place Friday, Oct. 13, and Saturday, Oct. 14, at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis., with the annual membership meeting on Sunday, Oct. 15.

With the convention getting close, we encourage you to reserve rooms immediately. For the first time in FFRF’s 46-year history, the convention will take place on a “Football Saturday,” meaning convention-goers are competing with Wisconsin Badgers fans. All details, including hotel contacts and deadlines, can be found on the back page.

The convention will not only showcase FFRF activism, but will place special emphasis this year on the threats of white Christian nationalism and to abortion rights. It will also include “godless” entertainment and cameos by two drag queens!

Joining the lineup will be author and filmmaker **Jeremiah Camara**, who also serves on FFRF’s Executive Board. Jeremiah is author of *Holy Lockdown: Does The Church Limit Black Progress?* and *The New Doubting Thomas: The Bible, Black Folks & Blind Belief*, and creator of the widely watched video series “Slave Sermons.” His two full-length documentaries are “Contradiction: A Question of Faith,” examining the saturation of churches in Black communities coexisting with poverty and powerlessness, and “Holy Hierarchy: The Religious Roots of Racism in America.” He’ll speak about his forthcoming documentary, “The Age of Appeasement.”

Other convention speakers include:

- **Elie Mystal**, receiving FFRF’s Clarence Darrow Award. The Harvard Law School grad is author of the bestselling *Allow Me To Retort — A Black Guy’s Guide to the Constitution*.
- **Robert P. Jones**, founder and president of Public Religion Research Institute and author of two books on white Christian supremacy.

A trio of other experts on white Chris-



Photo by Chris Line

Tahira Clayton is part of the Godless Gospel, which will perform at the convention.

tian nationalism will dominate the Saturday morning program:

- **Amanda Tyler**, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and organizer of Christians Against Christian Nationalism..
- **Andrew Seidel**, author of *American Crusade: How the Supreme Court is Weaponizing Religious Freedom*. He worked for FFRF as a constitutional attorney and is now VP of strategic communications at Americans United.
- **Bradley Onishi**, a faculty member at the University of San Francisco. He is author of the new book, *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism — And What Comes Next*. Abortion rights will be addressed by three expert speakers:
- **Jen Castle**, national director of abortion service delivery at Planned Parenthood Federation of America. She will accept on behalf of Planned Parenthood the \$35,000 Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award.
- **Mary Ziegler**, a noted abortion rights legal expert and advocate. She will receive FFRF’s “Forward Award,” given to those who are moving society forward. She is the author of many arti-

cles and six books on social movement struggles around reproduction, autonomy and the law

- **Lizz Winstead**, a political satirist. She will receive FFRF’s “Emperor Has No Clothes Award.” Winstead is a co-creator of “The Daily Show” and a founder of Abortion Access Front, a team of comedians, writers and producers who use humor to destigmatize abortion and expose the extremist forces working to destroy abortion rights. She will be the Saturday night keynote speaker.
- **Godless Gospel**, which will do an encore of its acclaimed debut at the 2022 national FFRF convention.
- **Kate Cohen**, who writes elegant, freethinking columns as a Washington Post contributing writer exposing America’s reflexive deference to religion and its effect on education, health care and human rights. She will receive the Freethought Heroine Award.
- **Emily Olson**, a member of the city council in Owosso, Mich. She will receive FFRF’s “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” Award for bravely attempting to persuade the council to discontinue prayer.
- A secular legislative panel, which will include Wisconsin state **Sen. Kelda**

**Roys** and Minnesota state **Rep. Mike Freiberg**.

- Our student activist awardees — **Bear Bright** and **Laur Stovall** — are suing over cancellation of a drag show sponsored by student clubs on the West Texas A&M campus. The students, fittingly, will be introduced by two local drag queen performers — **Bryanna Banx\$** and **Latina Envy**.

Also featured will be the usual “Highlights of the Year” from Co-Presidents **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, the legal report by FFRF Legal Director **Rebecca Markert** and staff attorneys, and a report by the new (c)(4) FFRF Action Fund by FFRF Governmental Affairs Director **Mark Dann** and Senior Policy Counsel **Ryan Jayne**.

FFRF’s untraditional “traditions” will likewise take place: the Non-Prayer Breakfast with its popular “Moment of Bedlam,” the drawing for “clean,” pre-“In God We Trust” currency, musical interludes by musician Dan Barker, book and product sales tables, and chances to socialize.

An open house will be held on Thursday, Oct. 12, at FFRF’s impressive office, Freethought Hall, in downtown Madison from 4-6 p.m., with complimentary refreshments and a self-guided tour. The office quadrupled in size, thanks to generous donors, in 2015, and includes an auditorium, library and many freethought artifacts.

Hot beverages and continental breakfast will start the Friday opening program, and complimentary cake and hot beverages will conclude the first day of the conference.

There will also be optional meals: a Friday buffet, and three group meals on Saturday. The annual membership meeting takes place on Sunday, Oct. 15, beginning at 9 a.m., followed by the annual meeting of the State Representatives, with adjournment about noon.

See menu, hotel and registration details on the back page, or sign up at [ffrf.org/convo2023](https://ffrf.org/convo2023).

### 2023 Convention Schedule\*

\*Schedule is subject to change

Thursday, October 12
<b>4-6 PM Open House, Freethought Hall</b> <i>Early registration, appetizers, self-guided tour</i>
Friday, October 13
<b>8 AM Registration opens</b> <b>Monona Terrace Community &amp; Convention Center</b> <i>Complimentary continental breakfast, coffee &amp; tea begins</i>
<b>8:55 AM “Die Gedanken Sind Frei”</b> Dan Barker at piano
<b>9 AM Welcome</b> Lisa Strand, director of operations
<b>Year in Review</b> Dan and Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-presidents
<b>9:30 AM Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award</b> Emily Olson
<b>9:45 AM “Forward Award”</b> Mary Ziegler
<b>10:30 AM COFFEE &amp; TEA BREAK</b> Book signing Mary Ziegler
<b>11 AM Freethought Heroine Award</b> <i>“We of Little Faith: An Atheist Comes Clean (And Why You Should Too)”</i>

Kate Cohen
<b>11:45 AM Book signing in lobby</b> Kate Cohen
<b>12 PM NOON LUNCH BREAK (on own)</b>
<b>1:30 PM Ballroom re-opens</b>
<b>2 PM Legal Highlights</b> Rebecca Markert & legal staff
<b>3:30 PM FFRF Action Fund Report</b> Ryan Jayne, Ryan Dudley & Mark Dann
<b>3:50 PM BREAK</b>
<b>4:15 PM Student Essay Winners</b>
<b>4:30 PM Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award</b> Planned Parenthood, Jen Castle
<b>5:15 PM Cash bar opens</b>
<b>5:15 PM BUFFET DINNER (ticketed)</b>
<b>7 PM TBD</b>
<b>7:15 PM “The Age of Appeasement”</b> Filmmaker Jeremiah Camara
<b>8 PM Godless Gospel</b>
<b>9 PM Complimentary cake and beverages</b>
Saturday, October 14
<b>8 AM NONPRAYER BREAKFAST</b>

(ticketed item)
<b>Moment of Bedlam</b> <b>Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award invocation</b>
<b>9 AM Ballroom, tables re-open</b>
<b>9:25 AM “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” song, Dan Barker</b>
<b>9:30 AM Student Activist Awards</b> Laur Stovall, Bear Bright <i>Introduced by local drag queens Bryanna Banx\$ &amp; Latina Envy</i>
<b>10 AM Christian Nationalism Experts “American Crusade”</b> Andrew Seidel
<b>10:20 AM “Preparing for War”</b> Bradley Onishi
<b>10:40 AM Champion of the First Amendment</b> Amanda Tyler, Christians Against Christian Nationalism
<b>11 AM Panel Q &amp; A from audience</b>
<b>11:30 AM Book signings</b> Andrew Seidel & Bradley Onishi
<b>12 PM BUFFET LUNCH (ticketed) NOON CHAPTER LUNCH</b>

<b>1:30 PM Ballroom reopens</b>
<b>2 PM Secular Legislative Panel</b> Minn. state Rep. Mike Freiberg, Wis. state Sen. Kelda Roys
<b>3 PM “The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy”</b> Robert P. Jones
<b>3:45 PM STRETCH BREAK</b>
<b>4 PM “Clarence Darrow Civil Liberties Award”</b> Elie Mystal <b>Book signings</b> Robert Jones & Elie Mystal
<b>5:30 PM Cash bar opens</b>
<b>6 PM DINNER (ticketed)</b>
<b>8 PM Drawing for Clean Money, emceed by Buzz Kemper</b>
<b>8:30 PM “Emperor Has No Clothes Award”</b> Lizz Winstead
Sunday, October 15
<b>8 AM Coffee, tea, light breakfast fare</b>
<b>9 AM Annual Membership Meeting</b>
<b>11ish State Representatives Meeting</b> <b>ADJOURN BY NOON</b>

Freethought Today Cryptogram

RG JXIL KLXKQL ZLSXJL JXIL WFNLQQWMLFN,  
  
NBLV SRIL QLGG TXI KILRSBLIG RFH JXIL TXI  
  
NLR SBLIG.  
  
—IXZLIN M. WFMLIGXQQ

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$9.95. See bottom of page for description and hint for this puzzle. Answer is on page 21.

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
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57	58	59	60					61				62	63	
64						65	66			67				68
69						70				71				
72						73				74				

Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

Across

1. Picture

6. New York time, acr.

9. A in IPA, pl.

13. Hawk's claw

14. Female forest ruminant

15. Freeze (2 words)

16. Knight's mount

17. \*Double helix

18. Nigerian money

19. \*Christopher Hitchens: "Mother \_\_\_\_ in Theory and in Practice"

21. \*2023 FFRF Convention location

23. \_\_\_\_ Diego

24. Capri, e.g.

25. \*Freethinker Robert Redford's role Sundance \_\_\_\_

28. Wholly engrossed

30. \_\_\_\_ Herman

35. Turns blue litmus red

37. Lawyers' charges

39. Duos

40. German mister

41. Take masts down

43. Forever and a day

44. Archaic word for belated

46. Headquartered in Brussels

47. \*Drug in Kurt Vonnegut's "Brave New World"

48. Product of photosynthesis

50. Be inclined

52. Negative vote

53. Toupee spot

Down

55. Immeasurably long time

57. \*Actress and SNL comedian Maya

61. \* \_\_\_\_ Schwarzenegger on what happens after death: "Nothing. You're 6 feet under."

64. Idealized image

65. 34th U.S. President

67. Better then good

69. The Beatles' " \_\_\_\_ Road"

70. Pigeon sound

71. Twisted cotton thread

72. Fail to win

73. Reunion bunch

74. \*Freethinker Picasso's art support

20. Big mess, to a soldier

22. Tall mountain

24. Same as reiterate

25. \*Irreverent Frida

26. Mountaineer's tool (2 words)

27. \*Tradition-challenging movie " \_\_\_\_ Dancing"

29. \* \_\_\_\_ Jillette, Teller's partner

31. Unfledged hawk

32. Conestoga vehicle

33. a.k.a. dropsy

34. \*Cornelius Vander Broek contest entry

36. Coffee remnant

38. Surfer's stop

42. Doomed one

45. Send, as in troops

49. Siesta

51. Smartphone plug-in

54. Not thin

56. Waterwheel

57. Iranian money

58. Rounded protuberance

59. Pats

60. Curved molding

61. #55 Across, alt. sp.

62. \*Freethinker Andrew Sean Greer's Pulitzer winner " \_\_\_\_ "

63. Earnhardt or Carnegie

66. Ornamental pond dweller

68. \_\_\_\_ Aviv

# MEET A MEMBER

## The sky's the limit for pilot who lost his Mormon faith

**Name:** Jarad Carter.  
**Where I live:** Phoenix.  
**Where and when I was born:** Provo, Utah, in 1976.  
**Family:** My wife, Jewelene, and I have been married for almost 19 years. We have three boys, one each in high school, middle school and elementary school, and a dog we adopted from the shelter one year ago.  
**Education:** I have a business degree from BYU and a master's degree in aviation from Everglades University.  
**Occupation:** Airline pilot.

**How I got where I am today:** Flying airplanes has been a great career to see a lot of the country. I have flown small planes in Alaska, commuter jets on the East Coast, tourists over the Grand Canyon, freighters throughout North America, and I now fly for the airline known for their LUV. Seeing so much of the country and getting to know so many people has helped me accept and celebrate people as they are.

**Where I'm headed:** Well, today I'm taking a flight from Phoenix up to Chicago and back. (I'm not sure why so many people are paying to come to Phoenix this time of year — 118 degrees today!).

Beyond today our goal is to raise our three freethinkers, build and participate in our community, and explore more of this beautiful planet.

**Person in history I admire and why:** Thomas Paine. He was not afraid to write about his secular views at a time when many people may have considered it absurd to not believe and worship a personal god. His book *The Age of Reason* was helpful to me as I deconstructed my faith.

**A quotation I like:** "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." — Mark Twain

**Things I like:** I like nature: trees, mountains, beaches, sunsets and sunrises, weather, space, plants and animals. Planet Earth and the life on it are truly incredible! And, although I'm not a musician or artist, I really like music and art and I appreciate the people who can contribute their beautiful works for the rest of us to enjoy.

**Things I smite:** Religion in general. I think we can build communities without the dogma, dollars and control churches require.

**My doubts about religion started:** When a brother-in-law left the Mormon Church, I reached out to him in an attempt to rekindle his faith. Not only did I fail, he got me to look into church history and begin questioning just enough to open a small crack in what I thought was my rock-solid faith.

The more I questioned, the more improbable the stories became. I dis-

Jarad Carter

covered other versions of the history that I had never been told. Versions of church history that were intentionally hidden from the general membership of the church. So, I lost my faith, but the church lost my trust (and my tithing!).

**Before I die:** I'd like to travel with my wife to so many places. Maybe try motorcycles and paragliders. Celebrate the big events in my kids' lives.

**Ways I promote freethought:** I feel like the most important work I can do to promote freethought begins by teaching my kids to question and think critically. In conversation, I like to think of other ways to see things and then bring up points that help us question our assumptions and biases.

I recently joined the board of the Valley of the Sun chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and I look forward to working with other freethinkers in Arizona to expand our presence and build a welcoming community.

**Favorite ice cream:** While I haven't yet discovered the one true flavor (but I continue to try), I'd say the classics Cookies n' Cream and Rocky Road are pretty close to the top.

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Freedom depends on freethinkers

Cryptogram hint

A cryptogram is a substitution puzzle in which one letter stands for another. If U equals T, it will equal T throughout the puzzle.  
Example:  
UOG RLQTM HYVBF DVP SLACN VWGY UOG KJEZ XVI.  
THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.  
This month's clue: N => T .



# IN THE NEWS

## Fired nonbelievers win \$50K in N.C. lawsuit

A North Carolina home repair company has agreed to pay \$50,000 to settle a lawsuit brought by two employees who were fired for refusing to participate in daily Christian prayers.

The lawsuit, brought by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against Aurora Pro Services of Greensboro, alleged the company created a religiously hostile work environment that constituted harassment on the basis of religion.

The two former employees, John McGaha and Mackenzie Saunders, who identify as atheist and agnostic, respectively, were let go after they declined to participate in a daily prayer circle, during which the company’s owner read bible verses.

Aurora Pro Services at first retaliated against McGaha by slashing his wages in half. In 2020, it then fired him. Saunders was likewise fired after she stopped attending the mandated prayer meetings, saying they conflicted with her beliefs.

## W.V. court blocks prison program targeting atheist

A federal judge in West Virginia ruled July 20 that the state corrections agency can’t force an incarcerated atheist to participate in religiously affiliated programming to be eligible for parole.

In a 60-page decision, U.S. District Court Judge Joseph Goodwin said Saint Mary’s Correctional Center inmate Andrew Miller “easily meets his threshold burden of showing an impingement on his rights.”

The state’s “unmitigated actions force Miller to choose between two distinct but equally irreparable injuries,” the judge wrote. He can either “submit to government coercion and engage in religious exercise at odds with his own beliefs,” or “remain incarcerated until at least April 2025.”

Goodwin issued a preliminary injunction requiring West Virginia Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation officials to remove completion of a state-run and federally funded residential substance abuse program from Miller’s parole eligibility requirements.

## Belief in five spiritual entities hits new lows

A new Gallup poll shows that the percentages of Americans who believe in each of five religious entities — God, angels, heaven, hell and the devil — have edged downward by three to five percentage points since 2016.

However, majorities still believe in each, ranging from a high of 74 percent believing in God to lows of 59 percent for hell and 58 percent for the devil. About two-thirds each believe in angels and heaven.

Gallup has used this framework to measure belief in these spiritual entities five times since 2001, and the new poll finds that each is at its lowest point. Compared with 2001, belief in God and heaven is down the most (16 points each), while belief in hell has fallen 12 points, and the devil and angels are down 10 points each.

In the current poll, 51 percent of

### Mile-high message



FFRF and its Denver chapter put up this 14-by-48-foot billboard proclaiming “Any book worth banning is a book worth reading” for four weeks in Denver on Interstate 70. The message is a quote attributed to polymath and humanist Isaac Asimov.

Americans believe in all five spiritual entities, while 11 percent do not believe in any of them.

## Fort Worth sued by atheist group over censorship

Metroplex Atheists, a Texas-based nonprofit advocating for the separation of church and state, filed a federal lawsuit against the city of Fort Worth, Texas, after being denied the right to hang banners promoting an event against Christian nationalism. The group argues the rejection was discrimination and a violation of free speech.

In May, the city manager’s office denied the group’s application to display advertisements on the city’s lampposts from Aug. 8-22.

Since 1998, the city has allocated free advertisement spots to nonprofits to promote their organization or any events as long as they are open to the public, of common interest to the general community and held in Fort Worth.

In the complaint, the organization contends that the city’s decision to deny the banner request violates the First Amendment. The complaint alleges the city favors pro-religious speakers, noting it regularly allows banners for Texas Christian University and has authorized a campaign for Kenneth Copeland Ministries’ Southwest Believers Convention in the past.

## Bill would exempt Sikhs from wearing helmets

Proposed legislation that would exempt those who wear religious or cultural headaddresses — such as a turban or patka — from wearing helmets when riding a motorcycle has cleared the California state Senate.

Sen. Brian Dahle, who introduced the bill, said he was approached by bikers in the Sikh community who said they wanted the ability to practice their religious beliefs while riding motorcycles. There are no helmets that accommodate headaddresses.

About 211,000 Sikhs live in California, making up nearly half of the nation’s entire community, according to the most recent U.S. Census data.

The bill cleared the state Senate on June 3, and now heads to the Assembly.

Eighteen states, including California, have adopted universal helmet laws since a federal safety penalty was repealed in 1995.

## Study: Trump judges more favorable to religion

President Trump’s appointees to the lower federal courts voted in favor of claims of religious liberty more often than Democratic appointees and judges named by other Republican presidents, according to a study.

However, the one exception is that Muslim plaintiffs fared worse before Trump appointees than before other judges.

The study found that judges named by Trump had “stronger or more numerous religious affiliations” with churches and other houses of worship, with religious schools, and with groups like Alliance Defending Freedom and First Liberty.

Trump appointees were also much more likely to be members of the Federalist Society, the conservative legal group, than other Republican appointees: 56 percent versus 22 percent.

## Church gets health provider to end gender surgeries

SSM Health, a Catholic health care system in Wisconsin, has recently stopped providing gender-affirming surgeries at their Aesthetic Center in Middleton following pressure from the Catholic Church to stop Catholic health care organizations from providing some types of gender-affirming care to transgender people.

The move comes after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops voted in June to amend directives for Catholic health care organizations, according to reporting from the Religion News Service. The vote

kickstarts a process that could ban Catholic-affiliated health care organizations from providing gender-affirming care to transgender people, the outlet reported.

## Post-pandemic, church attendance drops again

U.S. church attendance has shown a small but noticeable decline compared with what it was before the pandemic, according to a Gallup poll. In the four years before the pandemic, an average of 34 percent of U.S. adults said they had attended church, synagogue, mosque or temple in the past seven days. From 2020 to the present, the average has been 30 percent.

The recent church attendance levels are about 10 percentage points lower than what Gallup measured in 2012 and most prior years.

It is not clear if the pandemic is the cause of the reduced attendance or if the decline is a continuation of trends that were already in motion.

## Einstein letter rebutting creation story for sale

A letter written by Albert Einstein on the creation of the universe is for sale. The letter, written on April 11, 1950, to a group of Jewish students in America, is valued at \$125,000. In it, Einstein writes that a scientist cannot believe in the creation story of Genesis, arguing science “replaces and supersedes” such religious concepts.

Einstein wrote that he believed that the literal interpretation of the bible sees God as the creator of the universe. But he went on to state that he did not accept the creation story, not because it is disproved but because there is instead a scientific explanation.

## Consult needed in Guam for medication abortions

People seeking medication abortions on the U.S. territory of Guam must first have an in-person consultation with a doctor, a federal appeals court ruled, even though the nearest physician willing to prescribe the medication is 3,800 miles — an 8-hour flight — away.

The ruling handed down Aug. 1 by a unanimous three-judge panel on the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals could make it even more difficult for pregnant people to access abortions on the remote island. The last doctor to provide abortions in Guam retired in 2018. That changed in 2021 when a lower court partially lifted the territory’s in-person consultation requirement and said two Guam-licensed physicians in Hawaii could provide medication abortions via telemedicine.

Abortion rights advocates contend having no doctors able to provide abortions on the island creates a significant challenge to people seeking care. The court ruled other doctors there could conduct the in-person consultations even if they do not want to personally perform abortions themselves, but it’s not clear if any physicians in Guam are willing to take on that role.



# FFRF VICTORIES

By Greg Fletcher

## FFRF gets church to take down sign on right-of-way

A Bedford County, Va., church has taken down signs on public property after FFRF took action.

A concerned Virginia resident reported that Impact Church had been frequently placing advertisements on Perrowville Road alongside Jefferson Forest High School. FFRF understood that the right-of-way was under control of the Department of Transportation and that advertisements were not allowed to be posted.

“By allowing church advertisements to be posted in its right-of-way, the DOT sends an exclusionary message that needlessly alienates Virginians and travelers who are non-Christians,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to District Engineer Ken King.

Residency Administrator Todd K. Daniel responded to FFRF on King’s behalf. “We have reviewed the area in question and communicated with the Impact Church leadership concerning Virginia Code related to advertising in the right of way,” he wrote. Daniel stated that the church communicated that they understood the code and would comply.

## Latin cross removed from Texas police station

The Alpine (Texas) police chief removed a Latin cross from the lobby of the police station, thanks to FFRF.

FFRF was notified of the cross by a concerned community member, who reported that the cross is located above the entrance of the department’s building. As a nonbeliever, the complainant expressed frustration due to the department’s apparent favoritism of religion over nonreligion.

“The Constitution’s Establishment Clause — which protects Americans’ religious freedom by ensuring the continued separation of religion and government — dictates that the government cannot in any way show favoritism toward religion,” FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Chief Darrell Losoya.

Losoya responded to FFRF, informing it that the violation had been corrected. “The cross was removed from the lobby. I appreciate you reaching out to me,” he wrote.

## Teacher to cease wearing proselytizing T-shirts

FFRF has worked to ensure that teachers in the Willard Public Schools in Montana will no longer spread religious messages through their wardrobe.

A concerned district community member reported that a teacher at Willard Intermediate School wore a shirt with the religious message “Love Like Jesus” written on it at school during the day while acting in her official capacity. The faculty member posted a photo wearing the shirt that day on social media, and the classroom can be seen in the background.

“Students have the First Amendment right to be free from religious indoctrination in their public schools,” FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Eric Wilken.

FFRF received an emailed response from school legal representative Emily A. Omohundro, writing, “The district has taken steps to remind district staff of the district’s policies, including the requirement that they refrain from wearing attire that interferes with the educational environment and avoid the promotion of sectarian religious views at school.”

## OK board member won’t deliver graduation prayer

After FFRF got involved, board members from Tulsa Public Schools will no longer be allowed to deliver religious remarks, including prayers.

Concerned community members, including a school district staff member, have reported that a board member had misused their position to impose their personal religious beliefs on graduating students and families during the East Central High School graduation ceremony. Complainants report that the board member participated in the graduation in her official capacity and delivered an explicitly Christian prayer, invoking Jesus Christ by name.

“A school board member co-opting a public school graduation ceremony in order to promote their personal religious beliefs and ask students to engage in a religious ritual is inappropriate and unconstitutional,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote in a letter to school system’s General Counsel Jana Burk.

Burk responded to FFRF by includ-

ing the text of a message from Superintendent Deborah Gist. “Our schools will provide a precise script for board members to use in their commencement remarks, with an expectation that board members do not deviate from the provided script,” the message reads.

## FFRF removes verse from administrator’s signature

FFRF has worked with Pinellas County Schools in Largo, Fla., to keep religious texts out of school staff email signatures.

A community member reported that a district administrator included biblical scripture in her official Pinellas County Schools email signature. The complainant reported that they received an email from the principal of Bay Point Middle School that included the bible verse Jeremiah 29:11-13.

“It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the district or its agents to promote a religious message because it conveys government preference for religion over nonreligion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line.

FFRF received an email from School Board Attorney David Koperski, stating that the email signature “no longer contains the text that is the subject of your letter.” Additionally, the district is discussing reviewing the signature block practices to be used by all employees to prevent future offenses.

## Bible school promo on city Facebook page ended

The city of Blakely, Ga., has taken action to not allow posts advertising religious programs on its official Facebook page after FFRF complained.

A resident reported to FFRF that the city of Blakely promoted two vacation bible schools on its official Facebook page. The city posted about the events at least 12 times from late May to early June. The posts explicitly directed residents to “join us” in attending the religious events and promoted the First Baptist Church hosting the programs.

“By officially promoting these Christian vacation bible schools, the city of Blakely signals a clear preference for religion over nonreligion and a specific brand of Christianity over all other faiths,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Mayor Travis Whimbush.

Legal Representative Tommy Cole-

man responded to the letter, informing FFRF that these posts had not been presented to the mayor and council. Coleman assured that these posts would not continue. “It is my understanding that the city now better understands the parameters for community use of the city’s Facebook page. I do not expect any further postings of the nature and content you provided,” he wrote.

## FFRF stops mandatory quasi-religious assignment

FFRF took action when a high school band teacher assigned mandatory homework that discussed sex from a religious perspective.

A concerned parent informed FFRF of the assignment, which included statements such as “virginity is a virtue” and “You must be mature enough to provide those boundaries or it will hurt you.” The complainant reported that the entire class was disturbed by this religious assignment and many students refused to do it. The teacher then made the assignment mandatory.

“This plainly religious lesson is inappropriate and unconstitutional in a public school, and your teachers should know better,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Daniel Hamada.

Hamada replied, “At the time that Principal [Mahina] Anguay was made aware of the assignment, only one class had been exposed to the lesson. Principal Anguay immediately pulled the teacher into her office to discuss the matter with him. The teacher admitted to providing the lesson and agreed that he should not have been teaching that content in class.” Anguay immediately put a stop to the assignment.

## FFRF gets banned books back in Colo. schools

Three books removed from a Colorado school system’s libraries at the request of a conservative group will be back on the shelves after FFRF and a local activist demanded that the district either put the books back or ban the bible.

In May, the Academy School District 20 yanked three books from school libraries after a parent group

### Denver discussion



FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert, center, gave remarks to the FFRF Denver Chapter on July 29 on “Advocating for State/Church Separation in the Roberts Court Era.” Markert discussed the legal landscape with respect to the federal courts, and FFRF’s responses to the change in the law and the change in the federal judicial bench. She also discussed the new FFRF Action Fund, the (c)(4) lobbying arm of FFRF

### A note to FFRF Members

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known as “Advocates for D20 Kids” insisted that they be removed for sexually explicit content. The supposed offensive content led the group to deem these books as “obscene.” In response to this call, Superintendent Tom Gregory permitted all schools in the district to remove the three books.

This led to a concerned district parent asking for the bible to be banned based on the same criteria. FFRF then reiterated this request in a letter to Gregory.

“The district cannot ban books because it disagrees with the viewpoint expressed while allowing other inappropriate books because it supports their viewpoint,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote.

FFRF is pleased to report that the district has rescinded its initial decision.

“After careful consideration, the district assures that the removal of library materials will be based on established policies and procedures,” writes the school system’s legal counsel Tonya Thompson. “Therefore, any books recently removed without following the district’s procedure shall be reinstated and subject to reconsideration upon formal request.

### Mich. school ends prayer after FFRF intervenes

A Michigan school district has deleted Christian prayer from its senior award ceremony after FFRF conveyed the objection of parents to officials.

A Vicksburg Community Schools parent had informed the state/church watchdog that the May 2023 Vicksburg High School senior awards banquet, held at the high school, included two Christian prayers — one before the ceremony and one before dinner. The prayers were led by a district employee and the opening prayer was listed on the banquet’s program. Both prayers explicitly mentioned Jesus Christ and were overtly Christian.

“The Supreme Court has specifically struck down prayers given at public school events. Including explicitly Christian prayers as part of a school-sponsored awards banquet held on school property clearly crosses the line,” FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Keevin O’Neill.

The school district’s legal counsel wrote back: “The district appreciates you bringing district parent concerns about these invocations to its attention.

Please be advised that, from this point forward, the district will not incorporate invocations or prayers into school-sponsored events, like this reception.”

### FFRF has Ky. courthouse remove Christian display

FFRF was able to get the Grayson County Courthouse in Kentucky to remove a proselytizing sign from its walls.

A concerned Grayson County citizen reported that a large display reading “In God We Trust/Pray for America” was recently added to the outside of the courthouse. FFRF took action by writing a letter of complaint to the county judge-executive.

“Displaying a religious message on public property raises serious constitutional concerns,” FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote. “The Establishment Clause prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages.”

The complainant contacted FFRF and said the display had been removed.

### FFRF stops Texas school’s promotion of prayer

Due to the FFRF’s efforts, Burnet Consolidated ISD will no longer promote a prayer marathon before the start of the fall semester.

A complainant reported that the district was encouraging community members to “pray for the first day” of classes by praying for a specific group of people each day from July 26 to the first day of classes on Aug. 16. The district promoted the daily prayers in a post on its official Facebook page.

“By promoting prayer, the district sends an official message that excludes all nonreligious district students and community members,” FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Keith McBurnett.

McBurnett emailed FFRF back: “The Facebook post has been removed, and the district will refrain from posting anything similar in the future.”

### Ariz. board member stops reading bible verses

FFRF is pleased to report that a member of the Peoria (Ariz.) Unified School District governing board has agreed to stop reciting bible verses during meetings — at least for now.

FFRF wrote to the school district in late May, pointing out that board member Heather Rooks quotes from the bible at every board meeting, and

Arkansas pride



The Ozarks Chapter of FFRF participated in Northwest Arkansas Pride on June 24. The chapter hosted a table and members also walked in the Pride parade.

Marching in the parade are, from left to right, Juli Odum, Tyler Hawkins (carrying flag), Ryan Bradburn (in the background with yellow shirt), Aly Hearn, JP Anderson, James Brazeal and George Naidl.

Shown working in the booth are, from left: Naidl, Linda Laue, Odum and Kirsten Hawkins.



that another board member, Rebecca Hill, was starting to join in.

The board has heeded FFRF’s request and recently sent Rooks a letter directing her to stop quoting bible verses during meetings. At a recent board meeting, Rooks announced: “Based upon the district’s letter, I will refrain from reciting bible verses at this time and will have my attorneys at First Liberty Institute handle this matter.”

Rooks appears to openly embrace Christian nationalism and has invited

her followers to attend board meetings en masse, who sometimes disrupt the gatherings.

Wrote FFRF Attorney Chris Line: “While board members are free to promote their personal religious beliefs however they wish in their personal capacities outside of the school board, as government officials they cannot be allowed to commandeer the board in order to impose their personal religious beliefs on district students, parents, and employees.”



‘We Dissent’ is a monthly podcast by four women who are powerhouse attorneys at the major secular organizations in the U.S., including FFRF’s Rebecca Markert and Liz Cavell.

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# Oklahoma

Continued from page 1

could be denied admission, disciplined or even expelled if they or their family members are LGBTQ-plus, a different religious faith, or do not otherwise conform to certain Catholic religious beliefs.

- St. Isidore reserves the right to discriminate against students on the basis of disability and failed to show that it would provide adequate services to students with disabilities.
- St. Isidore plans to provide a religious education and indoctrinate its students in Catholic religious beliefs. The school’s application states that the school will “participate in the evangelizing mission of the [Catholic] Church” and will fully incorporate the Church’s teachings “into every aspect of the School,” including “all subjects” taught and all activities offered.
- The Archdiocese of Oklahoma City

will have control over the school in violation of board regulations that require a charter school to be independent of its educational management organization.

The plaintiffs are asking the District Court of Oklahoma County to block (1) St. Isidore from operating as a charter school, (2) the charter school board from entering into or implementing any contracts with St. Isidore and (3) the state from funding St. Isidore.

“It’s unconscionable for the state of Oklahoma to approve funding for an overtly sectarian religious school, whose purposes are to promote Catholicism, not public education,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

The team of attorneys that represents the plaintiffs includes Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott of FFRF.

# Court

Continued from page 1

churches after it awarded \$4.6 million in tax dollars to repair 12 churches. More than half of its total trust fund assets had been bestowed on churches, including \$1.04 million in allocations to the Presbyterian Church in Morristown to allow “continued use by our congregation for worship services.

The complicated case, with many judicial maneuverings, resulted in a strong unanimous decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court in April 2018, ruling the public funding of churches unconstitutional. FFRF’s win potentially saved New Jersey taxpayers many millions of dollars, since the grants to churches may have proceeded in a similar vein in all 21 counties.

Now, two New Jersey churches are seeking to undo this public benefit — and FFRF is determined to stymie their machinations.

“We will act to preserve the rights and interests of New Jersey taxpayers,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We won’t merely sit by and watch while religious entities maneuver to get the official funding spigot opened again.”


FFRF and Steketee are represented by local counsel Paul S. Grosswald and Richard Bolton of Boardman Clark. FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover and Senior Policy Counsel Ryan Jayne also represent the intervenors.

“We won’t merely sit by and watch while religious entities maneuver to get the official funding spigot opened again.”  
— Annie Laurie Gaylor



The Presbyterian Church in Morristown, N.J., is one of two churches in the state that are trying to overturn FFRF’s Supreme Court victory that ended Morris County’s practice of funneling taxpayer money to churches.

Yip Harburg,  
from his book: **Rhymes for the Irreverent**



Written by “Over the Rainbow” lyricist Yip Harburg. Illustrated by Seymour Chwast, published by FFRF.

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### Board in the summertime



Photo by Lisa Strand

The Executive Board of the Freedom From Religion Foundation held its mid-summer meeting at Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis. Standing from left: Chair Stephen Hirtle (Pa.), Michael Cermak (Pa.), Treasurer Steve Salemsen (Wis.), Secretary Cheryl Kolbe (Ore.), Granada Higgins and Jeremiah Camara (Ga). Kneeling from left: David Tamayo (Md.), Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor (Wis.) and Todd Peissig (Wis.). Not pictured: Sue Kocher (N.C.), who participated in the meeting remotely.

## Donate now to FFRF thru CFC

If you are a federal employee, you may make donations to FFRF through the CFC (Combined Federal Campaign) from Sept. 1 until Jan. 15, 2024. If you wish to help FFRF through this campaign, the CFC code to designate your contribution to FFRF is 32519.

It is recommended that all CFC donors check the box to include their name, mailing address and email with the donation. Donors will then receive an acknowledgment from FFRF when we receive pledge notification and we know how to process the donation.

From the CFC website: “The CFC is the official workplace giving campaign of the federal government. The mission of the CFC is to promote and support philanthropy through a program that is employee focused, cost-efficient and effective in providing federal employees the opportunity to improve the quality of life for all. The CFC is the world’s largest and most successful annual workplace charity campaign.”

## ‘Freethought Matters’ fall season begins!

Starting on Sunday, Sept. 3, and airing in 13 cities, the new season of FFRF’s lively weekly TV show “Freethought Matters” begins.

For those who don’t get a chance to view it live on television, all episodes are available to watch on FFRF’s YouTube channel or through FFRF’s website at [ffrf.org/news/freethought-matters](http://ffrf.org/news/freethought-matters). (You can find it under the “News” category and then under “Videos.”)

The intent is to introduce communities to leading freethought authors, thinkers and activists in a positive way. You can also receive notifications when FFRF posts new episodes of “Freethought Matters” by subscribing to FFRF’s YouTube Channel.

**“Freethought Matters” airs in:**

- Chicago, WPWR-CW (Ch. 50), Sundays at 9 a.m.
- Denver, KWGN-CW (Ch. 2), Sundays at 7 a.m.
- Houston, KIAH-CW (Ch. 39), Sundays at 11 a.m.
- Los Angeles, KCOP-MY (Ch. 13), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- Madison, Wis., WISC-TV (Ch. 3), Sundays at 11 p.m.
- Minneapolis, (Ch. 45, Digital Channel 5.5), Sundays at 9:30 a.m.
- New York City, WPIX-IND (Ch. 11), Sundays at 10 a.m.
- Phoenix, KASW-CW (Ch. 61, or 6 or 1006 for HD), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- Portland, Ore., KRCW-CW (Ch. 32), Sundays at 9 a.m. Comcast channel 703 for High Def, or Channel 3.
- Sacramento, KQCA-MY (Ch. 58), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- San Francisco, KICU-IND (Ch. 36), Sundays at 10 a.m.
- Seattle, KONG-IND (Ch. 16 or Ch. 106 on Comcast). Sundays at 8 a.m.
- Washington, D.C., WDCW-CW (Ch. 50 or Ch. 23 or Ch. 3), Sundays at 8 a.m.

Please tune in or record according to the times given above regardless of what is listed in your TV guide (it may be listed simply as “paid programming” or even be misidentified). And spread the word to freethinking friends, family or colleagues about a TV show, finally, that is dedicated to providing programming for freethinkers!

Please tune in to “Freethought Matters” . . . because freethought matters.



# Lorraine Hansberry scholarships announced

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is excited to announce, in association with the Women’s Leadership Project (WLP), the awardees of the 2023 Lorraine Hansberry Humanist Scholarship Awards.

FFRF gave \$2,750 to help fund scholarships for nine college students this year, totaling \$5,500. The honorees were chosen by the Women’s Leadership Project, which, with Young Male Scholars, conducts school and community-based peer education programming, outreach and professional development, offering invaluable life and job training skills.

The award memorializes Hansberry, the freethinking playwright, who famously wrote in 1964: “Though it be a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such time, it is doubly so — doubly dynamic — to be young, gifted and Black.” Hansberry’s freethinking play, “A Raisin in the Sun” (1959), was the first drama by a Black woman produced on Broadway.

Participating students meet weekly with program coordinators and interns and are trained in sexual harassment and sexual violence prevention, LGBTQ-plus youth leadership outreach and homeless education.

For the past several years, these youths have demonstrated outstanding social justice leadership, peer education and community organizing. These multi-year college scholarships are designed to support Women’s Leadership Project and Young Male Scholars’ youth through graduation. The majority are first-in-the-family college students. Graduating high school seniors received \$1,000 and continuing college students received \$500. Besides the Freedom From Religion Foundation, support was also provided by the Harrington Family fund, Matheson fund and Atheists United.

This year’s Lorraine Hansberry Humanist scholarship award winners:

- Asha Kent, UC San Diego, \$500
- Lizette Nsilu, El Camino College, \$1,000
- Kim Ortiz, Cal State L.A., \$500
- Brianna Parnell, Santa Monica College, \$500
- Mariah Perkins, Clark Atlanta University, \$1,000
- Zorrie Petrus, New York University, \$500
- Ashantee Polk, Antioch University, \$500
- Deaven Rector, Howard University Law, \$500
- Lizette Tecuapetla, Pomona College, \$500

## Asha Kent

I graduated from King/Drew Magnet High School of Medicine and Science. Thanks to the sisterhood, guidance, lessons, and unwavering independence the Women’s Leadership Project has instilled in me these past four years, I am grateful to say I will be attending the University of California, San Diego this fall with a major in Political Science and an emphasis in African American studies. My upbringing persuaded me to pursue a career in law, with the goal of becoming a criminal



Asha Kent

defense attorney by the age of 30. My time in the Women’s Leadership Project has handed me the necessary tools to succeed in any environment I’m in. It’s become a second home in shaping me into the woman I am today — from the shy girl afraid to speak her mind to the woman on her way to college with the intent of continuing this work in other communities.

## Lizette Nsilu

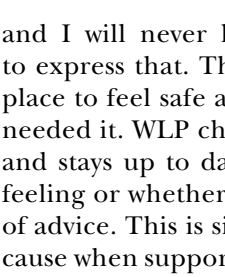
I graduated from King Drew Magnet High School and I will be furthering my education at El Camino College with a major in business administration in the fall of 2023. After completing my prerequisites at El Camino, I will transfer to Dominguez Hills to receive my bachelor’s degree in finance and go into the financial consultant career field. When I first joined Women’s Leadership Project, I was very quiet, introverted, and scared to try new things. Everything I’ve learned along this unfortunately brief journey has overprepared me for college, my career, and life itself and words couldn’t describe how extremely grateful I am to have experienced this opportunity. Thank you to the Lorraine Hansberry Scholarship for providing me with the opportunity to achieve my goals and thank you Women’s Leadership Project for helping me grow and obtain the skills I needed for my future endeavors.

## Kimberly Ortiz

I currently attend California State University of Los Angeles.

A current aspiration I have is to improve my mental health and work with kids in K-12 schools. I would like to thank WLP for assistance in guiding me through situations of hardships. WLP has made a significant impact in my life, and I will never have enough words to express that. They have given me a place to feel safe and included when I needed it. WLP checks up on students and stays up to date on how they are feeling or whether they need any kind of advice. This is significant to me, because when support is lacking at home, at least students like myself have access to this kind of safe space and welcoming environment.

Kim Ortiz



## Brianna Parnell

This fall, I will be beginning my second year at Santa Monica College. WLP has been important to me on my journey by encouraging me since high school to be a visionary and a leader. Specifically, being an alum paid intern has been very helpful because it shows how valued we are to the organization. Accepting the role as the #Standing4BlackGirls task force coordinator has been helpful to me because I get



Brianna Parnell

to make a difference in myself and my community as an activist and youth leader. It’s been an absolute pleasure to work with WLP for these years. I’m very grateful for this scholarship, and all the people involved including donors. Let’s continue the work!

## Mariah Perkins

I recently graduated from King/Drew Magnet High School. I will be attending Clark Atlanta University in the fall. I hope to earn my bachelor’s degree in biology. I plan on becoming a physician’s assistant. WLP has been an important part of my journey because they have taught me the importance of standing up for your rights and sisterhood. I have learned so many things over the past four years. Being able to speak up about issues that directly affect me and others that are like me has been such an amazing experience. WLP has given me the opportunity to amplify the voices of those who aren’t here while creating life long bonds.



Mariah Perkins

## Zorrie Petrus

I attended El Camino Community College from fall of 2019 to spring of 2023, but will be transferring as a sophomore to NYU for fall 2023. I got accepted to NYU Tisch School of the Arts where I’ll be studying photography. I am working towards getting my BFA and then an MFA. WLP has been important to my journey in many ways. Documenting our #STANDING4BLACKGIRLS events and many other events we’ve had has been an honor. The friends I’ve made through WLP are amazing (and I know they will be lifelong). I’ve been with the group since my sophomore year of high school and appreciate the knowledge I am constantly learning. There are so many experiences I’ve had with the group that I’ll cherish forever.



Zorrie Petrus

## Ashantee Polk

I’m a fourth-year student at Antioch University. My academic aspiration is to receive my bachelor’s degree in either psychology or business administration, my Masters of Divinity (MDiv.), and my Doctorate in Psychology. WLP has played a huge role in my journey because this organization has taught me a vast majority of what I know now about my community. WLP has also taught me skills I can use at work, around my home, and in my everyday life. My favorite part about WLP is the workshops we provide in the classroom and outside of the classroom. My other favorite thing about WLP is the sisterhood that it creates.

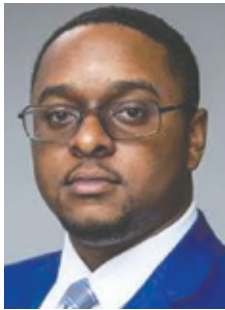


Ashantee Polk

I’ve been working with most of my peers since 2019 and every year, I learn something new about each one of them. I believe networking is important and I also believe building relationships with people you work alongside with is also important so this sisterhood in WLP is something I will never take for granted.

## Deaven Rector

I am in my third year at Howard University School of Law, specializing in education Law. Upon graduation next year and passing the California Bar, I am excited to join Fagen Friedman & Fulfroest LLP. As a junior associate at this premier California law firm, I will continue specializing in education law.



Deaven Rector

The Young Male Scholars’ (YMS) program has played a vital role in my journey. Before joining YMS while at Gardena High School, I had not considered pursuing a career in law or furthering any academic aspirations. Thanks to Dr. Sikivu Hutchinson’s exceptional mentorship, I improved as a student, became a social engineer, and cultivated my overall character. YMS enabled me to embrace the world of academia and recognize the many untapped possibilities available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. I am grateful to YMS for opening the door to a future I had previously not thought possible.

## Lizette Tecuapetla

I am excited to express my sincere interest for the Lorraine Hansberry Humanist Scholarship, which I believe will be instrumental in helping me fill the financial gap of tuition costs. As a highly motivated and ambitious first-generation student pursuing a bachelor of science degree in biology at California State Polytechnic University–Pomona, I strongly believe that this scholarship will provide me with the financial support and resources I need to achieve my academic and career goals.



Lizette Tecuapetla

From a very early age, I wanted to make a difference in the lives of animals. Having access to higher education allows me to convert those desires into reality. I aspire to become well-educated in the biological sciences to achieve my goal of pursuing a career in zoology. Around the time when WLP was developing #Standing4BlackGirls task force demands I recall the distribution of research-based questions/topics amongst WLP student members. I felt frustrated when I first began to navigate the web and conduct research because it was different from the quick-Google search questions I would investigate on my own for personal reasons. Research was a long process of back-and-forth inquiry. I lacked skills in this area at the time. Looking back, I am very thankful to have been challenged and trusted with this kind of work.



It pays to complain

After 9 years, anonymous mom goes public

By Megan Prather

In 2014, my son was a second-grader at a small-town public school in Oklahoma. At that time, I was a stay-at-home mom, so I was really active in the school. We were both very excited to be going on a field trip with his class to the Safari Zoological Park in Caney, Kan. We love road trips and were happy to be traveling about an hour from our hometown.

My excitement quickly dissipated when we arrived. Red flags started going up almost immediately. I noticed Christian creationism information on the walls in the lobby of the zoo. There were posters saying the Earth is only 6,000 years old and that

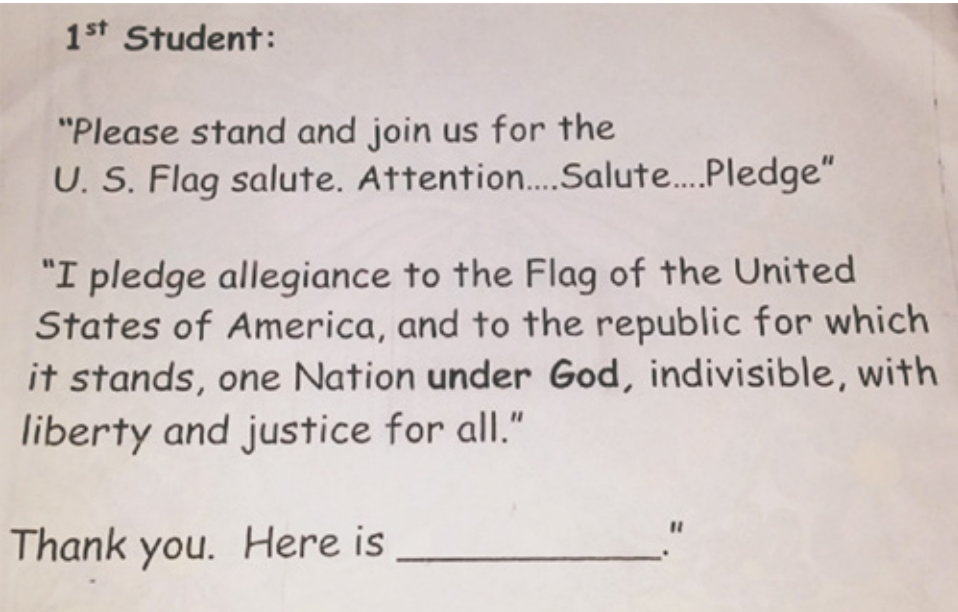


Megan Prather

the bible is an accurate depiction of our history. Things got progressively worse when our guide from the zoo spoke about God's miracles, how perfect God is, the great flood, and told students that God made all the animals. All of this while the students walked past Christian posters throughout the zoo.

I would have never willingly gone on that trip, but the permission slip didn't explain what type of zoo this was, so it was shocking as we continued through the zoo.

Earlier in the year, my son had another issue with his teacher selecting him to read the daily announcements over the school loudspeaker. When she sent home a practice sheet, she emboldened the words "under God" in the Pledge of Al-



A copy of the announcement Megan Prater's son had to read over the school loudspeaker shows "under God" in bold typeface.

legiance and told him he must say every word when he read the announcements.

With the pledge handout and now the school attending a creationist zoo, I knew I had to do something. I reached out to the Freedom From Religion Foundation for help and they quickly got to work.

At that time, I was fearful of not only being disowned by my parents and family for my atheism, but for the retaliation my children may face when they were at school, so I asked FFRF that my identity remain anonymous. (If they had been older, I probably would not have remained anonymous, and that's why I feel I can share this now.)

[Then FFRF attorney] Andrew Seidel worked with me to make sure that the school took these issues and several others seriously. He sent a letter to the

school superintendent outlining the violations.

To my surprise, we were not the only family that had complained of religious indoctrination in our town. Andrew's letter referenced other violations that the school corrected or stopped. Although we were unsuccessful in having the school remove "In God we trust" signs from each classroom in our district, the school did agree to stop attending the zoological park and it altered the pledge handout to no longer highlight any words.

FFRF's letter to the school sent a shockwave through our small town, with many people being outraged that the school must stop a years-long tradition of supporting this zoological park. There were calls on the town's Face-

book group to find out who made the complaint. People were upset. There were comments like, "Atheists are ruining everything" and "It's just a zoo" and "It's a wonderful tradition that this town has been doing for years."

I never even told my mom that I did this. At one point it came up at a family gathering and they were all complaining about "how dare the atheists ruin everything," and I just sat there in silence because it was me and I was too scared to say anything to my own family.

The town's residents decided to show their anger to this anonymous person by having a large presence at the school's Veterans Day assembly. In previous years during this assembly, a member of the school faculty would say a Christian prayer over the microphone. This was another issue that Andrew's letter addressed and the school agreed to stop. Although there was still a Christian prayer over the microphone, it was led by a student, not a faculty member.

After all these years, I decided to break my silence and share my story on TikTok. I have been amazed at the support and love I have received. There are nearly 2,000 comments on that video, almost all of them in support of what I did. (The video even led to me being asked to write this story.)

I may no longer be accepted by my family, but being open and unafraid to share who I am has helped me create new relationships with people who accept for how I am — atheism and all. I am very thankful to Andrew Seidel and FFRF that they kept my family and me safe while also putting a stop to violations of the law.

OVERHEARD

We live in two countries now: one in which basic civil and human rights are recognized and enshrined in law and another in which ideological extremists can decide how everyone else lives.

**Columnist Margaret Renkl, in "Tell me there isn't a witch hunt in Tennessee," about how her state is terrorizing trans people, including by demanding that Vanderbilt University Medical Center hand over documents from its clinic for gender-affirming care.**

*New York Times, 7-6-23*



Marci L. Bowers

**Association for Transgender Health.**

*New York Times, 4-3-23*

Years ago, I laughed at claims that Christian conservatives were dominionists in disguise, that we didn't just want religious freedom, we wanted religious authority. Yet now, such claims are hardly laughable. Arguments for a "Christian nationalism" are increasingly prominent.

**David French, in his column, "Who truly threatens the church?"**

*New York Times, 7-9-23*

For far too long, deeply religious laws have been imposed on an increasingly nonreligious country. This isn't a game of chess: automatic places for bishops represent outdated laws in need of change. It's time that our democratic systems better reflect our society and the values we hold dear.

**Sandi Toksvig, in her op-ed, "A seat in the House of Lords isn't God-given. It's time parliament ejected all the bishops."**

*The Guardian, 7-5-23*

Our schools are not ideological battlegrounds. They're not platforms for religious evangelism. These are institutions for learning and growth.

**Alex Douvas, a parent of two kids in the Temecula, Calif., school district, speaking to the school board, while discussing the three newly elected far-right school board members who now face a recall effort along with a civil rights investigation by the state's education department.**

*Politico, 7-9-23*

I don't know of any atheistic proselytizers. We aren't going door to door telling people to not believe in God. What I am trying to proselytize and what our group does is promote critical thinking. I think our state and the world, in general, would be better if people had stronger critical thinking skills. That's definitely evident by someone suggesting atheism is a state-sponsored religion.

**Jay Hovarter, president of the Atheist Community of Tulsa.**

*KTUL.com, 7-14-23*



Gentner Drummond

**I think its genesis is in Christian nationalism. There are believers that are confusing true religion — and religious liberty, and faith in God — with political power. And this Christian nationalism is the movement that is giving oxygen to this attempt to eviscerate the Establishment Clause.**

**Gentner Drummond, Oklahoma attorney general, who is against the landmark decision to open a public and taxpayer-funded Catholic school.**

*Politico, 7-17-23*

As the court's three liberals have repeatedly noted, it is a court that upends precedents like abortion rights and affirmative action simply because it has the votes to do so; that guarantees religious rights primarily for evangelical Christians; that creates fake doctrines to justify its crackdown on actions by the federal government with which it disagrees. Chief Justice Roberts may not like it when his liberal colleagues on the court call out the majority for these excesses, but the smiley-face sticker he placed on that decision can't cover up the true nature of the new Roberts court.

**Jesse Wegman and David Firestone, members of the New York Times editorial board, "Presenting the 2023 SCOTUS Awards."**

*New York Times, 7-26-23*

[Sinead] O'Connor was calling attention to hideous facts about the Church a decade before The Boston Globe's Spotlight stories put it on the national agenda. She used her musical celebrity in exemplary fashion to call out monstrous evil. She went directly after one of the most beloved public figures of the time, now canonized, and she did so at heavy cost to her own career. It was an exemplary use of free speech and an extraordinary act of courage.

**Bret Stephens, conservative columnist, discussing the death of O'Connor, who famously tore up a photo of Pope John Paul II on "Saturday Night Live" in 1992 in protest of the then under-reported sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church.**

*New York Times, 7-31-23*

The danger comes when these groups impose their religious views on others and inject church into the state through the power of government, as we've already seen in Idaho through the most restrictive abortion ban in the country, attempts to put a bounty on libraries and bans on gender-affirming care for transgender youth. No one is telling these groups to abandon their religious beliefs. We're just telling them to keep their religion in their church and out of our government.

**Editorial board of the Idaho Statesman, "Keep your religion out of our government. Dangerous activists coming to Idaho Capitol."**

*Idaho Statesman, 7-29-23*





Image from Shutterstock

# 30,000 days to count your lucky stars

*This column first appeared on Martin Hackworth’s Substack site (martinhackworth.substack.com) and is reprinted with permission.*

By Martin Hackworth

A lifespan of 30,000 days gets one into their early 80s. That’s better than the current average lifespan in the United States. You have to be smart with how you live, enjoy some luck and have some help from your genes to get that far. But if you do, in the end, it was a good long run — if you made most of those days count.



Martin Hackworth

Just about the worst thing that I can think of would be to wake up one morning without any memories. Memories, both good and bad, define us. The more grand ones that you can manage in your days in this life, the better off you probably are. That’s what the Roy Batty “I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe” soliloquy in “Blade Runner” was about. A short number of days, but he remembered almost all of them. That’s why he was good to go in the end.

I am the luckiest guy that I know. I have friends and family far better than I deserve. I got to climb and ski all over North America in my youth. I’ve been able to travel extensively. I’ve been able to spend significant time around incredibly smart, talented and inspirational people. I spent a career teaching university physics and astronomy. Due to the privilege of faculty life, people I respect correspond with me.

Now, I spend my days riding bicycles, writing, playing music and raising kids. Have there been some speed bumps? Certainly. But the juice has absolutely been worth the squeeze.

## Clock is ticking

Perhaps my greatest fortune was having a sense that the clock was ticking from a very early age. Where this came from, I have no idea. I just know that I’ve been aware since I was old enough to understand beginnings and endings that life is short and then you’re dead for a long time. This early awareness created a sense of urgency that forbade much indolence. It’s easier to get after things that you want to do when you understand that if you put them off, they might never get done.

Everyone has a last day, and unless your demise is sudden, you see it coming. I can’t imagine anything more desolate and melancholy than watching the end of your life, a one-in-a-quadrillion gift that the universe bestowed on you, approach with major regrets about the things that you always wanted to do but were somehow unable to find the time for.

In those last moments, it’s too late to write that book, to learn to play a musical instrument, to raise a wonderful family, to see the world, to build and create things that make the world better. In those moments, if you did none of those things, there’s only regret forging a dim path into the approaching oblivion.

I don’t know why everyone doesn’t have a sense that life is very short. I just know that it’s not uncommon. I read a book a long time ago where the author described a group of people wandering through life as if every day were a lazy Sunday afternoon that, while passingly pleasant, was just hot and uncomfortable enough to make everyone forget that Monday was just around the corner.

I see this view of life around me every day. I see it in unhappy people who complain all the time about virtually everything. I see it in people who believe that the fault is not in themselves but in their stars. I see it in crime, stupidity, jealousy, bigotry and willful ignorance. I see it in moral, intellectual and physical laziness. I see it in a lack of discipline. I see it in a lack of consideration for others. I see it in those who would be kings or kingmakers by foisting their views on everyone else.

And I particularly see it in fear. I see in people who are afraid to grow, to learn and to grab that brass ring while riding the only carousel there is and may ever be.

It’s a bit difficult for me to imagine that anyone would be predisposed to much unproductive nonsense in their final moments. Yet many spend the bulk of their lives engaged in just that, as if the halcyon days are going to last forever.

Lee Atwater, a Republican political strategist of the 1980s, advised presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush and was the chairman of the Republican National Committee. Atwater was a no-holds-barred brawler who was known for his aggressive tactics, most notably the Southern strategy. He was widely regarded as an effective political operative but a mean son-of-a-bitch. He

was both reviled and revered.

## Atwater’s confession

At the height of his career, Atwater suffered a seizure and received a diagnosis of terminal brain cancer. He saw it coming but had some time to make amends. In the end, he had to choose between being reviled or revered. He published an article in Life magazine on this topic shortly before his death. From that article:

“My illness helped me to see that what was missing in society is what was missing in me: a little heart, a lot of brotherhood. The 1980s were about acquiring — acquiring wealth, power, prestige. I know. I acquired more wealth, power and prestige than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty. What power wouldn’t I trade for a little more time with my family? What price wouldn’t I pay for an evening with friends? It took a deadly illness to put me eye to eye with that truth.”

I am aware that there are those who believe that Atwater was insincere in this confession and was spinning to the very end. But I’m going to go with granting grace to a guy staring down the barrel of his own mortality for having the wherewithal to sober up and seek redemption. Better late than never.

However, I am not the least bit religious. Maybe it’s a consequence of that ticking clock, which doesn’t leave much room for speculation. I don’t know. All I know is that I don’t think that we’re here due to anything other than sheer luck.

And luck it is, too.

We happen to live on the only planet around, at least as far as we know, that has been stable enough over a long enough time scale to support the evolution of complex life. This, in and of itself, is a miracle. We happen to live at just the right distance from a very stable star. Our planet, Earth, is just the size that we need it to be. We have a relatively large and very unusual moon at just the right distance from Earth to slow both our rotational rate, reducing destabilizing tectonic forces, and our precessional wobble.

We have an Oort cloud full of watery comets. We had just enough of the right mix of elements and radiation in the early solar system to create amino acids. We have a magnetosphere of just the right strength and a robust atmosphere to sustain organic life. And our solar system is arranged in such a manner as to prevent a lot of planet-killing debris from reaching Earth.

That’s an awful lot of cosmic luck. It’s not true everywhere, either. Consider that astronomers just observed a gigantic supernova, SN 2023ixf, in the Pinwheel Galaxy, 21 million light years away. SN 2023ixf already outshines its parent galaxy. If you are anywhere in the neighborhood, you are not having a good day. That’s mostly what the universe is — an incredibly harsh, incredibly unlucky place where everything is trying to not only kill you but prevent you from ever evolving from slime in the first place.

Yet, here we are. Lucky as hell is what it is. You need to wrap your mind around that every day. Are there some bad things in the world? Surely. But you know what? Beer still tastes good.

## Live your life

It’s not up to me to tell anyone else how to view life. I don’t have either the right or anywhere near the wisdom for that. All the wisdom that I do have to share on this is that the happiest people I’ve known are the ones who are aware that the clock is ticking and that, in the end, no one gets time back for any reason. Everyone I know who gets that is doing what they need to do right now to exit life without too many regrets.

And, for what it’s worth, I think that you should write that book. I think that you should learn to play music that you love. Finish that invention. Start that business. Travel, make friends and see the world. Laugh about stuff. Study things that interest you without regard to how difficult those studies might be or where they might lead. Others succeeded when the going got tough; so can you. Don’t ever be afraid to bet on yourself.

I think that you should walk right up to that attractive person who’s lighting up the room, look them right in the eye, and say, “My name is…” and then, “Let’s go, wallflower.” Create a wonderful family with them. Grow old surrounded by kids and grandkids.

I think that you should be bold and fearless, but not overly angry or argumentative. Extend grace where you can. But don’t let people push you around, either. Learn how to deal with chuckleheads in your wheelhouse. You can be a very nice person without being a pushover, something that I wish more people understood.

A sense of humor is never a bad thing. Cultivate one and life gets better fast.

A sense of wonder is never a bad thing, either. Along that line, get someone with a telescope to show you SN 2023ixf. Then count your lucky stars.

*Martin Hackworth is a physicist, writer and retired Idaho State University faculty member.*



# FFRF awards \$17,750!

## 2023 BIPOC student essay winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 11 top winners and 10 honorable mentions of the 2023 David Hudak Memorial Black, Indigenous and Persons of Color Student Essay Competition.

FFRF has paid out a total of \$17,750 in award money for the contest this year.

BIPOC students were asked to write on the topic of “Glad to be godless,” where they were to compose a personal essay explaining their journey to becoming a nonbeliever (or experiences as a lifelong nonbeliever), including any challenges they’ve faced.

Winners, their ages, the colleges or universities they are attending and the award amounts are listed below.

- FIRST PLACE**  
Baozhai Mai, 19, Williams College, \$3,500.
- SECOND PLACE**  
Esteban Jimenez, 19, Arizona State University, \$3,000.
- THIRD PLACE**  
Rae Davis, 19, Hamline University, \$2,500.
- FOURTH PLACE**  
Luci Green, 18, University of South Carolina, \$2,000.
- FIFTH PLACE**



- Vivien Talon, 20, Boston University, \$1,500.
- SIXTH PLACE**  
Eden Oboro, 18, University of Texas-San Antonio, \$1,000.
- SEVENTH PLACE**  
Ashley Jimmerson, 19, Loyola University, \$750.
- EIGHTH PLACE**  
TJ Black, 20, University of Illinois, \$500.
- NINTH PLACE**  
Anita Dinakar, 18, Purdue University, \$400.
- TENTH PLACE (tie)**  
Ashley Brumfield, 19, Louisiana Tech University, \$300.
- Deejuanae Lewis, 18 New York University, \$300.
- HONORABLE MENTIONS (\$200 each)**  
Paolo Bonarriva, 18, Frederick Community College.
- Arianna Cuevas-Galarza, 18, University of North Carolina.
- Kayla Garcia, 18, University of California-Irvine.
- Aija Keyes, 19, University of North Florida.
- William McPhail Jr., 19, Prairie View A&M University.
- Aditya Mehta, 18, University of California-Berkeley.
- Jastell Puente, 18, University of Oklahoma.

Kathryn Robinson, 18, Harvard University.  
Mariana Vaca, 21, Lake Forest College.  
Andy Yao, 18, University of Michigan.

FFRF thanks Lisa Treu for managing the details of this (and FFRF’s other essay competitions).

FFRF would also like to thank our volunteer and staff readers and judges, including Don Ardell, Paul Baker, Dan Barker, David Chivers, Patrick Duff, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Kate Garmise, Richard Grimes, Ricki Grunberg, Stephen Hirtle, Linda Josheff, Dan Kettner, David Malcolm, Gloria Marquardt, Brent Messner, Chris O’Connell, George Pevarnik, Rose Mary Sheldon, Sue Schuetz, PJ Slinger and Karen Lee Weidig.

This contest is named for the late David Hudak, an FFRF member who left a bequest to generously fund a student essay contest.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to students of color since 2016. It has also offered essay contests to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, grad students since 2010 and one for law students since 2019.

### FIRST PLACE DAVID HUDAK MEMORIAL AWARD

## I want to see heaven before I die

FFRF awarded Baozhai \$3,500.

By Baozhai Mai

Being gay is a sin. How can I live with myself if I’m gay? I didn’t even believe in God, but I felt the weight of a lifetime of religious conditioning. Somehow, I felt that my very existence was a mistake. I lie awake at night, tears dripping down my face. Six years ago, I was a 12-year-old boy wondering if he was going to hell.

My Chinese grandpa told me that gay people are wrong, messed up in the head. I was called the f-slur hundreds of times in school by people conditioned by their parents that love has to be orthodox. I still live with that shame.

An institution that contributes to the oppression of marginalized people is a detriment to society. An institution that tears families apart and makes young people kill themselves

does not serve the betterment of society.

Rather than hate myself, I chose to love who I am and disregard those beliefs that do not serve me. And yet, being queer is not the only oppression that religion has caused. In Afghanistan, being a woman is a burden, justified with radical religious doctrine. Around the world, synagogues are being burned in a reminiscent violence that once perpetuated World War II.

Tibetan Buddhists are currently being persecuted, cleansed and murdered in horrible proportions.

Doctrinated religion does not make the world a safer place. Rather than providing a sanctuary for spiritual development, religion has consistently contributed to the group-think

identity that leads to the abuse and destruction of human lives. Rather than seeing our shared humanity, religion has divided us.

I represent the growing coalition of freethinkers that can see past the conditioning that hurts and divides us. I represent the new age of humanism — not a replacement for religion, but an entirely new growing belief in the power of individual humans to enact positive change in the world.

I don’t believe in God, but that doesn’t mean I’m not spiritual. I’m deeply attuned to my own psyche, my own desires, and my environment. I love spending time in nature because I feel connected to my body. There is more wisdom to be found by watching nature than in any religious doctrine.

“An institution that contributes to the oppression of marginalized people is a detriment to society.”

By listening deeply to our own bodies and using the capacities of our own reasoning, the BIPOC community can take a step forward to liberation. We have always been oppressed, so why must we oppress and divide ourselves further with religion? If we are to become an empowered people, we must use reason to recognize that our individual differences are the essence of what makes us human. When we are free to be our true selves, we will lift society from its roots of oppression and create a safer, more inclusive and more connected world.

Baozhai, 19, attends Williams College, with plans to major in psychology.

“I am an outdoors enthusiast,” Baozhai writes. “I love learning about the human mind’s ability to heal and transform. I am a passionate creative writer and enjoyer of the arts. I am an advocate for promoting happiness in the world and have taught English classes.”

### SECOND PLACE

## My journey toward atheism, liberation

FFRF awarded Esteban \$3,000.

By Esteban Jimenez

Religious convictions defined my upbringing and greatly influenced my life. But, as I grew older, I experienced a growing conflict between deep-rooted beliefs and burning curiosity.

Amidst this internal discord, I embarked on a transformative journey, one that led me to question my worldview, challenge my convictions, and ultimately find solace in embrac-

ing atheism. I found liberation, a reshaped understanding of faith, and a newfound sense of self.

Jehovah’s Witnesses, a distinct Christian denomination, served as a guiding light for my parents when they immigrated to the United States. They believed in the coming of Armageddon, an event that would cleanse the world of wickedness and usher in a paradise of faithful followers of “Jehovah” for all eternity. Salvation could only be achieved through faith in Jesus Christ, strict adherence to biblical principles and active par-

icipation in religious activities. With best intentions, they ingrained these teachings into my young, impressionable mind, ensuring their significance would shape my life as well.

I felt different growing up, deprived of the liberties many others enjoyed. Celebrating birthdays, Christmas and other common traditions was strictly pro-

hibited. I had a limited social circle during adolescence and was actively discouraged from making friends outside the faith. I felt alone.

In high school, my biology teacher gave us an assignment on evolution. Here, I faced a choice: decline, or try to refute the theory with prepackaged religious arguments. I chose the latter in complete faith,

“I began to reframe my childhood adversity, no longer seeing myself as a victim of circumstance, but rather as the architect of my own life.”





Esteban Jimenez

but ironically, I found myself admiring the theory’s elegance and simplicity. It took time, but I eventually admitted defeat, realizing that my religion was mistaken about evolution. And, if they were wrong about this, what else might they be wrong about?

Despite being admonished against it, I ventured into the realm of apostate material, encountering information that challenged everything I had known. My sense of self, understanding of truth, and perception of a so-called “Jehovah” underwent irreversible transformations. Family relationships rapidly deteriorated, and I felt a deep resentment for the falsities incurred upon me. I had made a gaping hole in the wall, and as I stepped through, I found myself alone in my irreverent endeavors.

I was granted a scholarship to attend university, and it was here that I came to truly appreciate freedom from religious constraints. I began to reframe my childhood adversity, no longer seeing myself as a victim of circumstance, but rather as the architect of my own life. As I peered through the lens of my new outlook, I found a world filled with endless possibilities, diverse perspectives, and a profound appreciation for the beauty of human existence.

My path, from religious childhood to embracing atheism, has

been transformative and empowering. Despite limited opportunities early in life, university has bestowed upon me newfound independence, intellectual exploration, and self-discovery. With a secular worldview, I find solace, clarity and the liberty to shape my own identity. I proudly face the unknown with an open mind and unwavering commitment to continue my journey. I stand, glad to be godless.

*Esteban, 19, is from Payson, Ariz., and attends Arizona State University, with plans to major in neurobiology, physiology and behavior.*

THIRD PLACE

# How freethinking freed me

FFRF awarded Rae \$2,500.

By Rae Davis

Every Friday, we would drive past At-tucks Park. Children who looked like me would often play there. We pulled into the overflowing parking lot of the beige building with towering pillars; the largest building on the street, adjacent the park. Throwing my abaya over my clothing in the car, I would go inside. An Arab man would always stand at the door to greet people as they shuffled in. He did not greet my family. Unlike at the park, only a handful of people looked like me at the Masjid. I always wished I was at the park.

I was raised following the Muslim faith. I had been conditioned to view the world through a narrow lens. At the core of my perception of the world stood my faith that punished me for asking critical questions, for being Black, and for independently expanding my viewpoints on morality, fairness and the other gray areas in between.

Every questioning thought I had was followed by a prayer for forgiveness from God, “alhamdulillah, alhamdulillah, alhamdulillah.” Religion defined my purpose, but I wondered what perspective I would have if I looked through a different lens.

In my deconstruction, I formed a stronger appreciation for religion. I read religious books and realized that I could interpret those books like all of the other books I had read. They were no different from *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *The Book Thief*. The religious books were each based on someone’s morals and pillars of life. Like any other piece of material, I found fallacies, and even parts I agreed with. I finally recognized that I had a choice in my spirituality and faith. I could choose what material I agreed with, and I could take pieces from different religions to practice in

“Being unreligious is no longer the road less traveled.”

my life. It was a joyous moment when my original thoughts started to shine through. But I also felt a vulnerability because my belief system was shifting. My final decision was choosing “none.”

Like me, many of my peers have found themselves on the same path. Being unreligious is no longer the road less traveled. In my opinion, this is a step in the right direction. Religion really restricts one’s lens on life. Studies show that atheists tend to be smarter and happier. This can be attributed to the correlation between being non-religious and self-thinking/critical thinking. In my opinion, non-religious people are more likely to be on the correct side of social justice issues.

Many religions promote racism, discrimination, child marriage, anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, ableism and harmful groupthink. For example, many Christian nationalist groups actively

fight for voter suppression to take voting rights away from BIPOC people.

Religion is the reason why so many of my peers don’t feel comfortable coming out of the closet, the reason why my 13-year-old brother cannot walk down the street with a hoodie on, and the reason why my human rights are always up for discussion. Generation Z is the first to majorly push this norm and I think breaking away from religion is going to bring forth the largest social shift we have ever seen in the United States.

This is why I’m glad to be godless.

*Rae, 19, is from Bloomington, Minn., and attends Hamline University, where she is pursuing a degree in public health with a minor in biology.*

*“My career interests include medicine and research. In my free time, I enjoy catching up with friends, playing with my dog and reading. I also really enjoy baking and cooking! My favorite things to cook/bake are chili, sugar cookies and homemade pizza.”*

FOURTH PLACE

# Authenticity in atheism

FFRF awarded Luci \$2,000.

By Luci Green

For me, the choice to become an atheist was an obvious one. It’s difficult to contextualize the moments in my life that caused me to reject religion.

Most of all, my narrative is intertwined with the impact of China’s one-child policy, which caused the widespread abandonment of unwanted girls. In my case, I was taken into an orphanage after being found as an infant and adopted by a white American couple — my parents — at 10 months old.

Then, six years later, my father died.

I was stoic when it happened. Having no conception of the permanence of death, it was hard to imagine why he wasn’t going to be around anymore. But it simply became a fact of life that he wouldn’t be a part of mine.

Of course, at 6 years old, it was easy to buy into people’s reassurances that my father was happy in heaven. But as I grew older

“It isn’t by chance that the social progress made within the past century has coincided with an increasing departure from religious dogma.”

and inevitably examined my life more critically, I became bitter as I couldn’t understand why everything had to be the way it was, and why things had happened the way they had. No matter how well-intentioned, I resented others who went on about how “blessed” I was to be brought to this country, or those who insisted that everything had happened for a reason. It was difficult to believe in a god who intended for me to be born as an abandoned orphan or allow my adoptive father to die. If those were the orchestrations of a higher power, then I didn’t want anything to do with it.

However, I didn’t turn to atheism in mere spite of religion. Above all, I found the Christian argument wholly unconvincing. Biblical stories were utterly contrived and mythological; religion was nothing more than superstition. I remained unconvinced by fear-mongering arguments like Pascal’s wager and the assertion that nonbelievers were eternally damned to hell. Furthermore, it was impossible to ignore that, historically, religion has been used to justify heinous



Luci Green

acts of oppression. Biblical scripture was invoked to validate slavery; Christianity became a tool for cultural erasure and the subjugation of indigenous people; patriarchal attitudes of religion endorsed the restriction of women’s rights and reinforced toxic gender roles. It isn’t by chance that the social progress made within the past century has coincided with an increasing departure from religious dogma. Where

religion alienates logic, atheism ultimately offers a more coherent and intellectually satisfying worldview, uncomplicated by institutional corruption and regressive bigotry.

Atheism has allowed me to unapologetically reclaim my identity. I am empowered to rely on my personal conviction, driving me to be accountable and stay true to who I am. Moreover, my disbelief in a higher power does not diminish my sense of morality or capacity for compassion. Rather, it strengthens my commitment to ethical values and humanist principles. By rejecting religion and embracing freethought, I choose to live a truly authentic life grounded in reason, compassion, and the pursuit of truth — and for me, there is nothing more freeing.

*Luci, 18, is from Columbia, S.C., and attends the University of South Carolina, with plans to major in chemistry and minor in chemical engineering.*

*“I seek to attain my master’s degree and eventually attend law school,” Luci writes. “It is my aspiration to become a chemical patent attorney, as this is a career that marries my interest in both law and scientific innovation. I am especially proud to bring representation to this field in which less than 2 percent of racially diverse women have established a profession.”*



FIFTH PLACE

Rejection of religion as a form of liberation

FFRF awarded Vivien \$1,500.

By Vivien Talon

My separation from religion was a long transformation. Being raised in the Philippines before moving to the United States, my family was devoutly Catholic and so was everyone around me. I never even knew of anyone who wasn't. However, my relationship to God was not one of faith but complacency. I was taught that he existed whether I bought into it or not, though if I didn't, I couldn't be a good person. More accurately, my relationship with religion was not a choice, but was a matter of avoiding the inevitable punishment that came from pursuing a reality without it.

After immigrating, I questioned my allegiance to the Church. Going to public school and finally meeting people who weren't raised like me demonstrated that I could meet good people who weren't even religious at all, and that they received no divine punishment. At school, religion wasn't as pervasive

“I found liberation in detangling myself from religion and unlearning my religious guilt from freely thinking.

in life as it was before — there was no prayer to start the day, no prayer before lunch, no prayer at all. At first it felt like a reprieve from what I regarded as a chore, but soon I noticed God's absence beyond school. He was not there in my moments of suffering or triumph. At best, he was just a witness to my life.

Outside of God's absence, the Church's innumerable abuses further turned me away. In my own investigation of colonial remnants in and outside of my life, I saw how the Church creates and recreates oppression, justifying this harm with vague interpretations of archaic bible verses. Nonetheless, many maintain that religion nurtures empathy and community, and sometimes it can. Yet these messages are often shallow, preached with an underlying threat of what happens if one doesn't reach one's quota of good deeds — acts that uphold a certain group of people as the morally superior class. Such communities dehumanize those outside of their restrictive narratives, and even police one another to maintain this exclusivity. Thus, their consequences are overwhelmingly



Vivien Talon

negative. In Filipino culture, I see how religion has been used to shame our indigenous heritage, equating Christianity (and whiteness) with civility. Now I yearn for a history I've never known. This supremacy persists in broader society, most apparent in legislation rooted in legacies of oppression — by denying necessary gender-affirming healthcare, withholding bodily autonomy from those with a uterus, and in violence against BIPOC.

Ultimately, religion leaves little room for nuance and villainizes critical thought. Religion provides an overly simplified worldview, offering scapegoats and too-easy answers to complex issues. Those not governed by religion's arbitrary values build communities with solidarity, and progress through critical introspection. I found liberation in detangling myself from religion and unlearning my religious guilt from freely thinking. Of course, I still bear respect toward religious people. It's more accurate and effective to criticize their institutions, instead. But, in discovering my ability to find sound justification for causes I believe in, I'm far more impassioned and empowered than if I had confined myself to religion.

Vivien Talon, 20, is from Sparta, N.J., and attends Boston University, with plans to major in psychology and minor in public health. “I am an active member at my school's Filipino Student Association, where I am able to celebrate my Filipino culture with peers my age through dance, music and community,” Vivien writes. “I hope to pursue a career blending public health policies and action-oriented research on health conditions. I have also started an internship at a nonprofit called the Right Care Alliance, which empowers people affected by medical debt through research and protests.”

SIXTH PLACE

Because it was not made for me

FFRF awarded Eden \$1,000.

By Eden Oboro

I am the product of two Nigerian parents, and if you know anything about Nigerians, then you may know the direction this is going. I was raised in an extremely religious household. We went to church every Sunday, even sometimes during the week, and I accepted it because I didn't think rejecting it was even an option. As I grew up and began to learn more about myself, I realized that I was lesbian. In my head, I think I'd already come to terms with the fact that everything I was learning was nonsense, but still, I was consumed by guilt.

It was hard to not feel guilty when “Being gay is a sin!” and “All gay people will go to hell!” were phrases that I'd been hearing my whole life. This made me struggle with my identity for years, but as time passed and I grew older, I

realized that there wasn't anything inherently wrong with me. The church simply was not made for me and that was something I would have to come to terms with. I learned that I could be my own person — that my family members weren't the people who defined me, I was. This realization was an awakening for me. I finally felt comfortable in my own skin. It wasn't an easy journey, but it was definitely liberating. I'm not sure if my family will ever truly accept me for who I am, but that was something that I'd have to embrace. I'm glad to be free from religion because I think that it's made me a better person overall. I am able to make my own choices, think for myself, and I no longer feel the need to adhere to a set of

“We allow religion to further separate us when we could be coming together to grow as a community.

beliefs in order to feel fulfilled. I think society, BIPOC especially, would benefit from freeing their minds from the shackles of religion. As a lesbian, I don't think Christianity was made for me, but, as a Black woman, I definitely don't think it was made for me. Historically, religion has been used as a tool to oppress us, and for a long time we were excluded from those spaces. Now, we allow religion to further separate us when we could be coming together to grow as a community. I encourage BIPOC to challenge their beliefs and to seek knowledge and truth beyond the confines of religious doctrine. By undertaking this approach, we can make steps toward a more inclusive and accepting society.

I am grateful that I was able to challenge my beliefs and develop my own set of virtues. In doing this, I have become a more accepting person, both of myself and others, a more empathetic person and a better critical thinker. Ultimately, the freedom to think for ourselves, question authority and make our own choices is what makes us human, and I am proud to be part of a generation that is reclaiming that freedom. Eden, 18, from Katy, Texas, attends the University of Texas at San Antonio, where she is majoring in computer science. “I chose this major because coding is something I'm passionate about,” Eden writes. “Also, I believe that computer coding is the future, and I plan to make big changes in the future. In my free time I enjoy reading books, fantasy being my favorite genre, and working with children.”

SEVENTH PLACE

My journey to being godless

FFRF awarded Ashley \$750.

By Ashley Jimmerson

I grew up as a biracial young woman in a Christian household where faith played a significant role in shaping my identity. It provided a sense of community, moral guidance and an explanation for the world's complexities. However, as I embarked on my personal journey, I found myself straying from the path of religious conviction. Now, at the age of 19, I proudly identify as a nonbeliever, and

I want to share the story of my journey to becoming “godless” and the personal advantages I have discovered along the way. My departure from religious belief was not an overnight occurrence but a gradual process marked by moments of doubt and introspection. As I entered my teenage years, I began questioning the teachings I had previously accepted. I sought answers beyond blind faith, yearning for a deeper understanding of the world and my place in it. This quest for truth led me to explore different philosophies, scientific

explanations and alternative perspectives on life. Challenges were aplenty along this journey. One of the greatest hurdles I faced was the fear of disappointing my deeply religious parents. As a biracial individual, I already felt the weight of expectations from society, and straying from their religious path only added to the complexity of my identity. Engaging in open conversations about my evolving beliefs required immense courage, empathy and patience. Although our viewpoints differ, I am grateful that my parents have come

to respect my decision and love me unconditionally. Becoming “godless” has granted me a newfound sense of liberation and personal advantage. By embracing reason over faith, I have unlocked the freedom to think critically, question dogmas and shape my own moral compass. I am no longer bound by religious doctrines that restrict my beliefs, actions and relationships. This liberation has allowed me to explore a more holistic understanding of humanity, embracing diverse perspectives and engaging in open dialogue with others.



For BIPOC communities, the embrace of reason over faith can be particularly empowering. Historically, religion has been a tool of colonization and oppression, often used to justify racism, discrimination and cultural erasure. Breaking free from religious dogmas allows individuals within these communities to reclaim their own narratives, celebrate their cultural heritage, and challenge oppressive systems.

Reason becomes a powerful tool to dismantle harmful ideologies and advocate for social justice. Moreover, the separation of reason and faith offers an advantage in the realm of social policies. By basing decisions on evidence, critical analysis and empathy, we can create policies that are inclusive, equitable and rooted in the collective well-being of society. Reason enables us to evaluate the impact of social policies objectively, without the bias of religious dogmas that may perpetuate discrimination or deny cer-



Ashley Jimmerson

tain rights based on personal beliefs. Being “godless” does not imply a lack of morality or purpose. On the contrary, it allows me to find meaning in personal connections, humanistic

values and the pursuit of knowledge. I cherish the opportunities to form authentic relationships, guided by empathy, compassion and respect for others. Without the constraints of religious doctrines, I am free to forge my own path, navigate the complexities of life and contribute to the betterment of society in a way that aligns with my values and convictions.

My journey to becoming a non-believer has been a transformative experience. It has been marked by moments of self-discovery, challenging conversations and the embrace of reason over blind faith. By stepping away from religious conviction, I have gained personal advantages, including liberation, critical thinking skills and the ability to advocate for social justice. For BIPOC com-

munities and social policies, reason provides a powerful tool to challenge oppressive systems and foster inclusivity. I am grateful to be “godless.”

Ashley, 19, is from Shorewood, Ill., and attends Loyola University, where she is majoring in criminal justice/forensic science.

“I am dedicated to unraveling the mysteries of the human mind and contributing to the field of criminal justice,” Ashley writes. “Alongside my academic pursuits, I actively engage in volunteer work, particularly

in organizations focused on mental health advocacy and promoting inclusivity. I aspire to pursue advanced degrees in forensic science and psychology, with the goal of combining research, clinical practice, and public service to make meaningful contributions to society.”

“By stepping away from religious conviction, I have gained personal advantages, including liberation, critical thinking skills and the ability to advocate for social justice.”

EIGHTH PLACE

# Religious guilt and Santa Claus

FFRF awarded TJ \$500.

By TJ Black

My belief in God faded the same time I found out Santa doesn’t exist. That was the push I needed to question everything, and trust nothing at face value. Even to a kindergarten, an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent being creating the universe, let alone creating humans in its image, seemed unlikely. My skepticism only grew when presented with science and history. With even a basic grasp of these, one realizes that many stories of the bible are not only not true, but ridiculous and impossible.

Noah’s Ark was a story that I never believed. How would all those animals fit on a ship, and live together in harmony? How did they feed the animals on the ship if the Earth was flooded? Even if those questions were answered (and usually they were answered with the last hurrah of the defeated and

“After doing research and engaging in critical thought, a belief in some sort of anthropomorphic God becomes impossible.”

ignorant man with no real answer: “God”), the human gene pool would be reduced to Noah’s family.

For years, I fought hard against this logical conclusion and tried to convince myself that there was some higher power, that the religious adults were not lying straight to my face when they claimed to know there is a god. I remember begging for a sign, asking anyone and everyone for any sort of proof, but what placated them did not satisfy me. I remember praying for a response to my questions, but deep

down I knew that there was nothing there. When I asked for evidence beyond vague biblical references from adults in the faith, I remember being greeted with a smug smile and was told “God could not be tested” and to simply “have faith.”

As hard as I tried to believe these baseless ramblings that in fact oppose the scientific method, that isn’t how belief works, especially not skeptical belief like mine and likely yours. After doing re-



TJ Black

search and engaging in critical thought, a belief in some sort of anthropomorphic God becomes impossible.

In my early adolescence particularly, I felt purposeless and guilty, feelings further compounded by my mother as she frequently told me that it is impossible to live a full and happy life without religion. Many years went by with me frustrated and angry, searching for meaning outside of

God and being largely unable to find it. However, when I was around 16, I ended my bouts of shaky and overcompensating agnosticism with steadfast atheism after hearing these words: “What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.” I was no longer afraid of being a skeptic, even if my unwavering commitment led people to call me a cynic or a pessimist. By rejecting unfounded faith in God, I freed myself to the array of ideas and concepts that otherwise I never would have even encountered. Through this I create my own value structure and belief system, not a premade one that deprives the subject of critical thought — that is the reason that I am most glad to be godless.

TJ, 20, is from Urbana, Ill., and attends the University of Illinois, where he is majoring in urban planning.

“Intellectual curiosity is of utmost concern to me, I never want to become complacent and self-absorbed in what I know,” TJ writes. “The thing I have learned most in life is that I don’t want to be narrow-minded, and I want to continue to challenge myself and put myself into experiences that will broaden my horizons.”

NINTH PLACE

# Freethinking: The key to liberation

FFRF awarded Anita \$400.

By Anita Dinakar

Be quiet, be obedient, follow the rules, and copy the behavior of other kids if you want to fit in. But being a neurodivergent, queer, brown girl means you can’t fit in even if you want to. My journey to being godless showed me that I don’t need to fit in, that I can resist complacency and conformity and be better off because of it. I’m glad to be godless because being freethinking has freed me from so much more than religion.

As an autistic student of color in a majority-white school district, I have been socially excluded by more than a

few white, non-disabled students and teachers who are conditioned by religion to be complacent with systems of oppression and to believe in conformity above all else.

My instinct as a child was to conform to try to fit in. When that didn’t work, I attempted to capitalize on my perpetual otherness and be different on purpose to try to gain any semblance of attention from my peers. I eventually learned to be proud of all my identities and being different because of my experiences with being nonreligious. I am grateful to be godless first by chance, and now by choice. As I child,

“Being freethinking has freed me from so much more than religion.”

I was lucky to have a choice over my participation in religion and to have chosen not to participate because I simply did not understand religion. I learned to be content with the discomfort as almost every other kid talked about going to church or celebrating

Easter over the weekends. As I grew older, being freethinking also taught me to do my own research and listen to alternative perspectives. By listening to people who, like me, didn’t fit in, I began to discover new things about myself and identities that ex-



Anita Dinakar

See Dinakar on page 16



# Dinakar

Continued from page 15

plained why I didn’t fit in, but also introduced me to vibrant communities I didn’t realize I could be a part of. Being godless saved me from a life of not only being tied to a religion, but also being tied to conformity and exclusionary ideals I could never live up to.

TENTH PLACE (tie)

# Religious homophobia and the Black community

FFRF awarded Ashley \$300.

By Ashley Brumfield

*“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.” Leviticus 20:13.*

That is a quote that has been repeated in my Black household since May 2018. I was in eighth grade and was going through what some may call a phase. I listened to “alternative” music, had a terribly edgy sense of humor and started questioning Christianity. It has been five years since then and only one of those things stuck.

I began exploring the hypocrisies in religion. From watching “Religious” to various atheist YouTubers debate Christians, it was seemingly never-ending. I started questioning how my parents had two children before marriage, yet they did not feel as though they were going to hell. I was confused as to why Black people were so welcoming to Christianity, even though Christianity is the very same religion that helped justify American slavery and segregation in the United States. I continued to question the

Recently, I am even more glad to be godless as my communities and my education are attacked under the guise of religion. Whether it be banning books by Black and Indigenous authors, accusations against my public school of indoctrination and a lack of religion, or homophobia and transphobia against my peers, being godless and seeing through discrimination endorsed by religion has given me the strength to stand up for myself and my classmates.



Ashley Brumfield

need for the church as I developed my political views.

One evening in May 2018 helped answer my many questions. On that evening, my sister came out to my mother. My sister is five years older than me, but we were very close. After that evening, I was not allowed to be close to my sister. My parents began subscribing to these beliefs that gay

Knowing I do not have to conform to religion or any other idea of who I should be empowers me to speak out despite knowing that people will dislike me for it. Being godless allows me to be the fullest version of myself and to fight for the liberation of my BIPOC, disabled and queer communities. Being freethinking is what makes me truly free.

Anita, 18, is from Grimes, Iowa, and attends Purdue University, where she plans to major in engineering.

*“I aspire to be an engineer and develop medical technology with the equity and inclusion of BIPOC, disabled, LGBTQ-plus communities, and other marginalized communities in mind,” Anita writes. “I am a National Merit Scholar Finalist, a Presidential Scholar Candidate, an AP Scholar with Honor, and have received awards through National History Day, Technology Student Association, Science Olympiad and many music competitions.”*

people were pedophiles, that certain foods turned people gay and that homosexuality was contagious.

They began going to a very Christian therapist in hopes of changing my sister’s mind. My sister told me the main topic of conversation was about me, and how they can protect me from my sister’s homosexuality. For months after, my mom would quote the verse I mentioned above. Saying she wasn’t homophobic, but she just did not want my sister to go to hell. She was not homophobic, but she just had to stop paying for my sister’s private college tuition.

I was confused as to why Black people were so welcoming to Christianity, even though Christianity is the very same religion that helped justify American slavery and segregation in the United States.

community.

My mother said she hated President Obama because he broke the family unit. I asked her how, and she said, “by legalizing gay people.” Due to this belief, she refused to vote Democrat in the 2020 election. She ultimately voted for a party that has historically harmed our community, simply due to religious-based homophobia. Understanding this and being able to discuss this with my peers is why I am glad to be godless.

Ashley, 19, is from Zachary, La., and attends Louisiana Tech University, where she plans to major in computer information systems/cyber security.

*“I plan on creating a club for my major on campus,” Ashley writes. “I am a lover of history and the French language. I currently have two part-time jobs. I enjoy learning about politics, and my belief in the separation of church and state plays a huge part in that.”*

TENTH PLACE (tie)

# Free from religious beliefs

FFRF awarded Deejuanae \$300.

By Deejuanae Lewis

A disturbing reality persists in Jamaica, a country with a record-breaking number of churches. Despite the religious prevalence, there are alarming numbers of robberies, murders and violence against LGBTQ members occurring daily. Growing up in this environment, parents engulf their children in prayers and sermons, leaving no opportunity for independent thought.

Sundays meant attending church, dressed in uncomfortable attire, to meet judgmental churchgoers’ expectations. I’ve seen the people who claim to be followers of Christ pass judgment on those who do not fit their standards. The church’s people are superior, and anyone not on their level is ostracized. The children of these churchgoers absorb their beliefs unquestioningly, regarding members of the LGBTQ community as worse than murderers. This mindset has led to discriminatory violence, which is often unpunished because of the alignment of the police with the same religious beliefs. Some of these Christians perform

“I expected a book [the bible] of such importance to be easily understandable, but it proved otherwise.

their dirty deeds, but when Sunday comes, they pay their offering, and now all is good.

After moving to the United States, my family couldn’t find a suitable place of worship, prompting me to read the bible independently. I have not finished, but I have discovered contradictions and confusing points so far. It makes me wonder if God were truly an omnipresent and righteous being, why would he not provide more relevant life guidance, and why does he endorse heinous crimes? It’s jarring to read about the murder of children and enslavement of others, all in the name of the lord. My conversation with other Christians about my readings has only led to their attempts to downplay or reinterpret the text. I expected a book of such importance to be easily understandable, but it proved otherwise.

Religion’s uncertainty and corruption have become clear to me. I have decided to discard the concept of God, gain intellectual freedom, and take personal responsibility for my actions. I no longer rely on divine powers to relieve me of consequences; instead, I prioritize inclusivity and fairness. I no longer see suffering as a punishment for my sins but as a result of circumstances beyond my



Deejuanae Lewis

control. I have realized it is not God who controls my destiny, it is me.

Integrating an atheist mindset into BIPOC communities holds an advantage. Reason and evidence-based thinking allow people to examine systemic inequalities and pursue social change critically. We can make more substantial arguments against oppressive structures with concrete evidence rather than religious dogmas. Humans can believe in different religions, but reasonable ones will not deny facts. Furthermore, freethinking in BIPOC commu-

nities can encourage engagement in STEM fields, promoting scientific innovation. We can actively participate in shaping the technologically bound future. By adopting secular beliefs, I have found empowerment, a meaningful approach to life, and the freedom to ask questions. I believe this approach can aid BIPOC communities by helping them more effectively navigate the complexities of life and social systems.

Deejuanae, 18, is from Elizabeth, N.J., and attends New York University, where she plans to earn a degree to become a software developer.

*“I recently won third place at the Future Business Leaders of America State Coding and Programming event,” Deejuanae writes. “In addition to my technical pursuits, I love to draw. My mediums include digital art, manual vector design, realistic sketching, and acrylic painting. I draw inspiration from media and nature, and my artwork has been recognized through winning Art Club competitions.”*

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker n.

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



# BIPOC essay contest honorable mentions



The following are snippets taken from the essays of those who earned honorable mention distinction.

### Paolo Bonarriva

Moving through high school, adversities that challenge my identity and my character moved me from a dark place in my life where I saw nothing but the abyss — a depression wherein I found my atheism to be a byproduct. I found myself seeing the beauty of life and love and everything the world can offer me, and in finding my passion in the performing arts, my faith was restored — however, not in any existing sect. I am agnostic now.

To say that I place all my confidence and trust into a higher being would be crazy, but through a belief that favors a personal effort over blind devotion, I find the spirit to truly pursue my own life.

*Paolo, 18, is from Frederick, Md., and attends Frederick Community College, working toward an associate's degree in theater, and a double major in English.*

### Arianna Cuevas-Galarza

My religion felt like a shadow that haunted me at every corner. I struggled with my identity for many years and Christianity solidified that fear I felt in my soul over who I was and what I wanted.

Once I let go of my religion, I began to enjoy life and see things clearly. Love is light and religion is only a means of subjugation. Since I made this discovery, I have rid myself of the darkness and the shadows and freed myself from the shackles of eternal damnation. With no fear of inevitable doom, I was able to let in the light that guides me to my eternal happiness.

*Arianna, 18, is from Wilmington, N.C., and attends the University of North Carolina, with plans to major in English on the pre-law track.*

### Kayla Garcia

How could I worship a god that allows for the abuse of children or calls for the death of homosexuals? I refuse to give my body and soul to a man who condemns me

to hell simply because I am not heterosexual. My body, my lifestyle, and support is for me to give. No one can tell me who or what I need to believe in.

I don't care where I go once I die, I care about actively changing and helping people while on Earth.

That's why I am proud to be godless. I focus on the here and now.

*Kayla, 18, is from Naperville, Ill., and attends the University of California-Irvine.*

### Aija Keyes

From an early age, I have always had a logical outlook on the world, and I have never subscribed to the notion that God exists in any form or fashion.

Although I had never believed in God before, my experiences during my Christian middle school years reinforced my lack of faith. After considerable persuasion, my parents agreed to allow me to attend a public high school. The world opened to me once I began attending public school. This was the first time in my life that I truly felt liberated from religion.

*Aija, 19, is from Lauderdale, Fla., and attends the University of North Florida, with plans to major in political science.*

### William McPhail Jr.

Why do Black Americans hold Christianity so dear to their lives, arguably more than white Americans? Is the same God that their enslavers worshipped the same one I worshiped and feared?

To be Black and to be Christian means you have to accept slavery as a necessary circumstance that saved Africans from sin, the same ideology that white nationalists, the KKK and enslavers used to justify slavery to the church.

As I reflect, these heart-wrenching occurrences made me glad to be godless.

*William, 19, is from Fort Worth, Texas, and attends Prairie View A&M University, with plans to major in law.*

### Aditya Mehta

Reason ensures that progress and equality are guided by evidence rather than blind faith, countering discrimination masked as religious practice.

Embracing reason not only liberates individuals from the constraints of superstition, but also empowers them to make meaningful changes in society. By promoting critical thinking and evidence-based approaches, we, as the next generation of leaders, can challenge oppressive systems, fight discrimination and strive for a more equitable future.

*Aditya, 18, is from Morrisville, N.C., and attends the University of California-Berkeley, with plans to major in anthropology and data science.*

### Jastell Puente

The deconstruction of my faith began when I started to understand the unfair ways Christianity was being utilized against others. Many people are suffering because of the way Christians interpret the bible. Sexual orientation, gender identity and body autonomy are all under attack in America.

I took some time to reflect about whether it was better to believe in God out of fear, or to refuse blind faith and take control of my life.

For the past few years, I stopped living my life for anyone or any religion, only for myself.

*Jastell, 18, is from Oklahoma City and attends the University of Oklahoma, with plans to major in health and exercise science.*

### Kathryn Robinson

Religion serves to compartmentalize, avoid accountability and to control — declaring “eternal” moral codes supported by sacred texts and then conveniently manipulating them as needed.

Most disturbing is how religion is used

to justify oppression and marginalization of people of color throughout history.

By embracing secular humanism, we can encourage scientific and technological progress that can lead to new innovations in renewable energy, healthcare and education, thereby creating a more sustainable and equitable society.

*Kathryn, 18, is from Orlando, Fla., and attends Harvard University, with plans to major in biomedical engineering.*

### Mariana Vaca

I began to feel sick to my stomach when they would say that everything happens for a reason and would think about the inhumane struggles that they refused to address from xenophobia, colorism, discrimination and sexual violence that we face every day especially as minorities. The idea that God always has a plan started seeming like a reason for inaction and lack of agency.

Faith is an invisible rope to hold onto, but BIPOC communities deserve more than a promise.

*Mariana, 21, is from Chicago and attends Lake Forest College, majoring in English.*

### Andy Yao

I had this idea that worship was meant to bring people together — and here it was, driving a rift in our community.

For all the issues I've had with my beliefs, though, I don't regret staying distant from religion. I've been able to connect with people based on who they are rather than what they believe in.

I've found that religion promises unity and turns communities against each other. It promises solidarity but reserves it for only a few. It offers bright benefits with more terms and conditions than a legal document.

*Andy, 18, is from Midland, Mich., and attends the University of Michigan, with plans to major in computer science.*

# Anti-abortion violence is on the rise

By Barbara Alvarez

Anti-abortion legislation is inherently violent. And anti-abortion violence is also evident in extremists who protest at clinics and assault patients, providers and volunteers alike. These instances are on the rise, as seen in the latest Operation Save America protest in Georgia.

In mid-July, anti-abortion protesters affiliated with Operation Save America swarmed the area near Preferred Women's Health Center in Atlanta. Due to a medically inaccurate “fetal heartbeat” law, in-clinic abortions are unavailable past six weeks of gestation in the Peach State. Official records show just how much access to care has plummeted.

For example, in 2021, the state recorded over 42,000 abortions. In the first five months of 2023, there have been only a little more than 14,000 abortions, with



about 15 percent of them Alabama residents who traveled to Georgia. But the anti-abortion protesters with Operation Save America and its affiliates are determined to eradicate whatever care — however minimal — is left.

Operation Save America describes itself as an organization that “unashamedly takes up the cause of preborn children in the name of Jesus Christ.” Its director was a participant in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection and has called on followers to “prepare for combat.”

At the recent protests in Georgia, former Operation Save America Directors Benham and Rusty Thomas called for a full national abortion ban with no excep-

tions, stating “You're going to shed blood in the womb, you're going to reap it in the streets.” Another speaker, Raymond Ibrahim, who is known for Islamophobia and homophobia, urged protesters to “fight back” and that Christians need to “adopt a more militant mindset.”

This is nothing new. In the 1990s, an Operation Save America leader distributed wanted-style posters of Dr. David Gunn, an abortion provider in Alabama. Dr. Gunn was killed in March 1993 by anti-abortion protester Michael Griffin. And anti-abortion violence is on the rise.

For example, the National Abortion Federation's 2022 report details the staggering statistics. Take a look at these horrifying numbers:

- Stalking of providers and patients increased by a whopping 913 percent.
- Obstructions to clinics increased 538 percent.
- Bomb threats increased by 133

percent.

- Burglaries increased by 100 percent.
- Assault and batteries increased by 29 percent.

With abortion illegal or largely inaccessible in a significant portion of the country, anti-abortion extremists are targeting the remaining clinics where abortion is still available in attempts to thwart care and reproductive autonomy. By forcing people into parenthood, anti-abortion laws strip individuals of their bodily autonomy.

Abortion is health care and must not be outlawed simply because of the Christian nationalist views of the few. Anti-laws and clinic violence work together to prop up life-endangering rhetoric and practices. In a functioning secular democracy, reproductive autonomy should be a guarantee for all. Our secular voices, counterprotests and votes are urgently needed.

*Barbara Alvarez is a contributing writer for FFRF.*



IN MEMORIAM

Woody Kaplan was lifelong rights advocate

FFRF Lifetime Member Woody Kaplan, advocate for civil rights, liberties and freedom of speech, died of cancer on Aug. 3. He was 80.

“Woody was one of the persons who caused the moral arc to bend much faster, always on the front lines,” comments FFRF Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann. “Woody saw how another person’s liberation was tied to his own — and that nobody is free until we all are.”

He went to Mississippi in 1962 to work on voter registration drives, served in Vietnam and championed LGBTQ-plus equality as the horror of the AIDS crisis was unfolding. He served at one time on the ACLU national board and was a founding member of the Secular Coalition for America. He was a successful commercial real estate businessman who, when he retired 30 years ago, devoted his life to political work advocating for civil liberties and rights.

He was also a longtime board member of Defending Rights and Dissent, a successor organization to the National Committee to Abolish HUAC (the House UnAmerican Activities Committee). He became an



Woody Kaplan was a co-founder of the Secular Coalition for America.

FFRF Lifetime Member in 1999.

“Woody left an indelible mark on the secular movement throughout his productive career,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “He was an early and enthusiastic advocate for secular lobbying and advocacy in Congress, and uniting secular groups under one banner.”

Under Woody’s leadership, the Secular Coalition for America grew from four national organizations to 21 today (including FFRF), and established the first full-time lobbyist in

Washington, D.C., representing atheist, humanist and secular Americans.

Woody helped many in the secular movement advance their careers. Dann notes that Woody had an exceptional political mind and understood how money, popular movements and a smart strategy can come together to create change. “His legacy will inspire generations of secular activists to come,” says Dann.

Herb Silverman, co-founder of the Secular Coalition for America, said, “Woody was passionate about advocating on behalf of atheists and envisioned a lobbyist on Capitol Hill who would represent all secular Americans. He single-handedly helped insular secular organizations unite to become an organized political movement.”

Woody was honored with the 2023 Secular Coalition for America’s Lifetime Achievement Award at its last meeting of member organizations in February. At SCA’s last executive committee meeting as he shared news of his prognosis, he asked those in the meeting not to be sad, only saying, “I had a great time.”

He is survived by his wife Wendy Kaminer.

Jack Monroe was teacher, protester

John “Jack” Monroe died March 31 at his home in Claremont, Calif.

Born Oct. 22, 1938, to John and Dorothy Monroe in Girard, Ohio, Jack was the oldest of six siblings. After graduating from Ursuline High School and working for Ohio Leather Works, he decided to attend college, and enrolled at University College of Notre Dame of Saskatchewan, Canada (now Athol Murray College of Notre Dame). There he learned about the Canadian educational system that then included “grade 13” and “senior matriculation.” He was a member of the 1957 Notre Dame Hounds football team that won the provincial championship. Transferring to the University of Ottawa, he earned a B.A. in 1961, and later an M.A. from the University of La Verne.

He and his wife Carolee married in 1962 and traveled from Ohio through Canada to his new teaching position in San Gabriel, Calif. They celebrated their 60th anniversary last year. With their children, Murray, Gabe and Mary, they frequently vacationed in “the incredible slow-

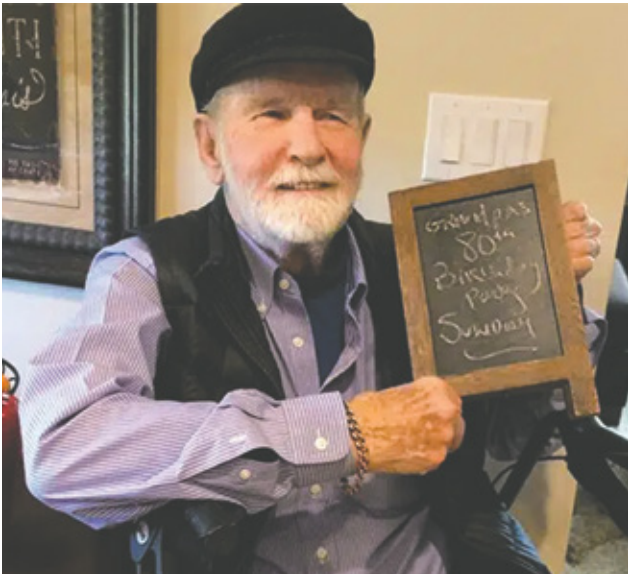
mobile” across the United States and into Mexico.

He taught at Nogales High School in La Puente for 38 years. For many of those years he was known as “the voice of the Nobles,” as he announced the school’s home football games.

His years of activism began with anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. He was present in 1967 at the Century Plaza demonstration, when the “police riot” of heated motorcycles drove into the protesters. Active in Bobby Kennedy’s California campaign, he was present at the Ambassador Hotel on June 5, 1968, when Bobby was killed.

Locally, he demonstrated for progressive causes. “He had strength of belief and the willingness to act upon it,” his family shared. He continued to be present at rallies and demonstrations and, as he could not attend, sat on his porch in support of the Claremont Change demonstrators walking by.

“A lively conversationalist, Jack could talk with people for hours,” his family said. “He practiced the art of questioning and valued dialogue. He practiced what he preached: a proponent of



Jack Monroe

exercise, he walked on land, meeting the neighbors and, in water, he once met up with a manatee in Tampa Bay. He kept a journal and chose not to eat red meat. Jack mastered the phrase, “What can I do to help?”

Dick Boardman was professor, building contractor

FFRF Member Richard P. Boardman, 83, died March 5 at Briarwood Assisted Living in Worcester, Mass., after a brief illness.

He was born in Bristol, Conn., son of Frank G. and Nancy (Doane) Boardman. His beloved wife of 59 years, Judith “Jaye” (Brightman) Boardman, died in 2020.

Dick, as he was known to friends and family, grew up in Plainville, Conn., and Woodstock, Vt. During his youth, he spent time at his family’s farm in Hartland, Vt., working with his father and learning carpentry skills that he would use his whole life. He graduated from Vermont Academy in 1957, where, at 6 feet, 8 inches tall, he proved to be an accomplished basketball player. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Dartmouth College, his master’s degree from Chicago University, and his

doctorate in education from Columbia University. While at Columbia, he worked with his mentor, Robert Dentler, the director of Columbia’s Institute for Urban Studies, to co-author a report for the New York State Education Commission on Desegregating the New York City Public Schools (1964). Commonly known as the Allen Report, it was intended to provide the data and research to support the desegregation of the New York City public school system, then the nation’s



Dick Boardman

largest school district.

After finishing his doctorate, he taught at the college level for several years. In 1970, he and Jaye moved their family to Princeton, Mass., where they had a small farm and practiced homesteading. Soon after that, he left teaching to start his own general contracting business, Boardman Builders. His lifelong passion for building and renovating homes spanned more than 50 years and resulted in custom built homes throughout Worcester County and many other towns where he lived throughout his life.

Dick loved animals and had a special affinity for Old English sheepdogs, which he and Jaye raised for many years. He also loved music. He played the double bass and amassed an impressive record collection of every genre. He enjoyed watching sports, basketball in particular,

and was a big fan of the Celtics and the UConn women’s team. After retiring, he and Jaye enjoyed traveling, relaxing at their Florida and Cape Cod homes, and spending time with family and friends.

**American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll**

By Orvin Larson

Prof. Larson writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.

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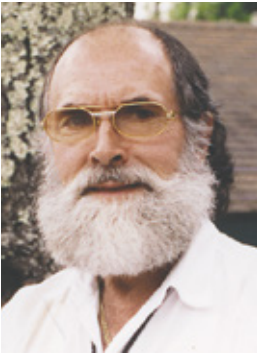
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# Jacques Le Fresne, artist, dies at 93

FFRF Member Jacques J. Le Fresne, 93, who designed FFRF's Winter Solstice greeting card "Train in Snow," died June 27 at his home in Ocala, Fla.

"He was very interested in your Freedom From Religion organization," said Joyce Griswold, Le Fresne's longtime companion. "He thought it was stupid to believe in myths, and he had a bumper sticker that said 'In Reason We Trust.'"



Jacques Le Fresne

Born in Fougères, France, in 1930, Le Fresne worked in leather goods until moving to New York City. There he went to school to become a hairdresser and "worked in one of the best beauty shops" in New York.

He lived in New York City until his only child, a daughter in her 30s, tragically was killed by a drunk driver. Always a doubter, that tragedy cemented his lack of belief in a deity.

"Two of my mother's sisters were very religious," Le Fresne wrote in Freethought Today in 2007. "One died of lung disease and the other of brain cancer after painful illnesses. I also lost my 35-year-old daughter at the hands of a drunk driver in 1989. These facts led me to question the ex-

istence of a just and merciful God."

In 1970, he and his mother moved to St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, where he opened up his own hair salon.

"I love pets, and eventually ended up with six parrots," Le Fresne wrote in Freethought Today. "Comedian pianist Victor Borge had a house in St. Croix and used to spend the winter season there. He loved my parrots and we became good friends. He used to bring celebrities who were visiting to my beauty shop. I did the hair of Maureen O'Sullivan, Maureen O'Hara, John Wayne and some models."

After his mother died in 1994, he eventually moved to North Carolina, then settled in Ocala, Fla., in 2001. Le Fresne became a U.S. citizen about five years after moving to the States.

Le Fresne first took up painting in his retirement.

"I had no formal education in painting," he wrote to Freethought Today. "I taught myself with the aid of a few books. I like to paint seascapes and landscapes as the mood strikes me."

FFRF first became aware of Le Fresne's artistry when he won a contest in 2007 for a new card to be marketed by FFRF. The watercolor landscape is a slightly nostalgic full-color painting of a train plowing through snow. In 2022, FFRF also created and sold a wall calendar that featured Le Fresne's paintings.



Le Fresne's "Train in Snow" watercolor painting currently appears on one of FFRF's Winter Solstice cards.

# Army vet Jimmy Stutts was an AIDS survivor, speaker

Lifetime Member James Michael "Jimmy" Stutts, 80, died on May 25 in Redwood City, Calif.

He was born Sept. 25, 1942, in Burlington, N.C. Jimmy volunteered for the United States Army and received the Army Commendation Medal for his service based in Munich, Germany, from 1964–1967. He then worked for Burlington Hosiery Company, later Kaiser-Roth Hosiery, traveling widely from 1967–1985, All That Jazz in San Francisco from 1985–1987, and

retired from the California State Automobile Association.

A long-term AIDS survivor, he was a popular speaker in schools on AIDS and STD-prevention for the San Mateo County AIDS Program from about 1998–2002.

He is survived by a sister in Iowa, two brothers in North Carolina, several nieces and nephews, and his partner of 45 years and spouse of eight years, Dick Miller of Redwood City.



George and his wife Sally at their 50th wedding anniversary in 2006.

# George Erickson was pilot, dentist, philanthropist

Beyond After-Life Member, bush pilot, philanthropist and dentist, George A. Erickson, 90, died July 14 at his home near Eveleth, Minn.

He was born on Oct. 23, 1932, in Virginia, Minn., to Lydia (Tervo) and Emil Erickson. George graduated from Virginia High School, Mesabi Community College and the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry. He practiced dentistry in Worthington, Minn., for about 30 years.

George and his wife Sally, who died Sept. 17, 2021, have two grown sons. George and Sally had been married 65 years.

In 2021, when his wife entered hospice care, "we decided that she should make a list of charities that she wanted to support when she died," George wrote to Freethought Today last year. "That list grew to at least 20 local, regional and national charities (including FFRF) that would receive a total of \$400,000, an amount made possible by her being a consummate homemaker and devoted mother to our two fine sons, plus her constant support of every project I undertook. Without that support, none of this would have been possible."

At age 30, George earned a private pilot's license, which he maintained until late in life. He loved to fly, especially around northern Canada. He also enjoyed writing and authored books about flying, the Canadian arctic, science, religion and the advantages of nuclear power. He completed his last book *Born to Fly* in the days before he died, and he would want people to know that his books are available on Amazon.com or his website *tundracub.com*. George was active in many advocacy and community organizations throughout his life, and he was instrumental in creating the Virginia Indoor Tennis and Pickleball Club.

George had been the chairman of the Worthington Airport Commission, a former president of the Nobles County Art Center, a former vice president of the Minnesota Seaplane Pilots' Association and has served on the New Brighton, Minn., Environmental Quality Commission.

His articles appeared in many newspapers and general interest and aviation magazines, a few being Mo-



George Erickson

torcycle Tour and Cruiser, The AOPA Pilot, Dental Survey, Mpls/St Paul Magazine, Airways Magazine, Private Pilot, the Minnesota Flyer, Northern Pilot, Cessna Flyer, the Minnesota Journal of Law and Politics, Canadian Flight and Arctic in Color. In 2000, George was named the Author of the Year by the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame.

He spent parts of 38 summers exploring far northern Quebec, Nunavut, the Territories and Alaska in a variety of planes, from Cubs to Cessna 206s.

George's PowerPoint presentations on bush flying in the far North and in Australia have been featured at many major cities across the United States and Canada and at aviation conventions, including the annual EAA AirVenture gathering at Oshkosh, Wis., with attendance of 700,000!

He was president of the Minnesota Humanists and a director of the American Humanist Association. He donated all of his book and CD profits to educational charities.

He was the topic of Freethought Today's "Meet a Member" feature in 2010, where he wrote: "There is great pleasure in being free of the artificialities of religion, in knowing that the sky god is a fiction designed to control (and profit from) the gullible who think they need religion to be good. I don't."



# LETTERBOX

## State/church separation should be absolute

My public school is not your church, synagogue, temple, mosque or other place of worship. Your bible, Torah, Quran or other scriptures are not to be taught as revelations in my public school. You are free to study them in your home or place of worship, but you are not free to impose them on others. And you will not ban any books based on your religious views. We live in a secular country where truth, respect and equality under the law are our shared aspirations. Do not tread on these ideals.

Illinois

## Number of Catholics is highly exaggerated

In Ken Burrows’ fine article “It’s our right to die on our own terms” in the August issue, he stated that “Pew Research finds that Catholics number over 60 million in the United States,” a figure which would make it by far the largest religious denomination in the nation, justifying its considerable political clout.

However, I would like to point out that I am counted as one of those Catholics, despite the fact that I have been an atheist since I was a teenager over half a century ago. The millions of Americans who, like me, were raised Catholic but who are now non-religious or who have embraced other religions are all included in that bogus number.

I come from a large Catholic family on my mother’s side and I know of several relatives who moved South and are now “evangelical Christians” and of one who embraced Judaism. One of my sisters is also an atheist. Guess what? The Catholic Church counts all of the above as devoted members of “the one true faith.” This is due to the fact that anyone who was born and baptized into the Catholic creed and who has not been excommunicated or reported to have died is included as an active member of the Church. This includes the possibly thousands of FFRF members who were baptized as Catholics!

Many leading figures in atheist and humanist organizations have been lumped into the grossly inflated membership figures provided by the Church simply due to the circumstances of their births. By contrast, in most other Christian sects you must be an active, dues-paying member in order to be counted. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church knows its reported membership figures are highly inflated but continues to lie about it, aided and abetted by a compliant and complicit media.

New York

## Airports a great place to leave Freethought Today

I’ve been traveling a lot this last year, and whenever I can, I take the current Freethought Today and leave it behind at whatever airport I’m at. Since travelers often are bored and have time on their hands, I thought this was a noninvasive way to maybe reach a larger audience (albeit one paper at a time).

Arizona

On the dock-et

FFRF’s legal team (and a couple of cute kids!) took a cruise on the Pontoon Porch on Lake Monona in Madison, Wis. in early July as a thank-you treat for the summer interns. FFRF also thanks Professor Paul Newman for the generous donation to fund the excursion every year.

## Nuns are not nearly as likable as described

I read the Julia Sweeney convention discussion in the August issue, and for the most part it was very good. However, I thought some of her notions about nuns were far from reality and seemed mostly based in movie propaganda.

I was born in 1947 and went to Catholic schools from grades 1-12. The vast majority of the nuns in my grade school were bitter, authoritarian and didn’t seem to like children very much. One of our principals used to stand at the top of the stairs and yell at everyone at the top of her lungs. She was eventually sent to some asylum!

Also, I think Sweeney’s comment about nuns being the feminists is absolutely ludicrous. Most of the women who entered convents in the 1930s and 1940s were forced to go by their parents because it was the Depression, lots of people were out of work, and it was one less mouth to feed. They didn’t do it because they didn’t want marriage or children. And it probably explains why they were so bitter and didn’t like children — they were forced into a life they didn’t want and were jealous of all the others who had a different choice.

Wisconsin

## Atheists shouldn’t put ‘Satan’ on license plates

I fail to see why any member of FFRF would ever want to have a personalized vehicle license plate with the term “Satan” on it because of the fact that Satan does not exist any more than God does. Satan is a creation by humans of a mythical being to punish evildoers in some nonexistent afterlife location of hell. It is not only illogical, it is incongruent.

The most logical personalized plate designation would be one that reads “No God” or “No gods.” But, because those plates may already be taken, a way to expand the number of options would be to translate that phrase into another language, such as “No Dios (Spanish),” “Nessun Dio (Italian),” “Kein Gott (German),” among many others.

Happy translating (and baffling the DMVs)!

Florida

## Why allow Sikhs to not wear motorcycle helmets?

This letter is regarding the California bill that would allow Sikh motorcyclists to ride without helmets. [See In the News on Page 5.] I am not a biker and have no personal interest in this beyond that it is galling that yet another exemption is being carved out for religious people under the guise of “discrimination.” If a helmet law makes sense, then why should someone be exempt for their religious beliefs? If not wearing a helmet has larger social costs, then why should I, a nonbeliever, underwrite the costs made by dead or injured Sikhs? If this becomes law, I can imagine the mass conversion of bikers from whatever they think they are (even atheists!) to being Sikh!

California

## Sands of time bring melancholy, solace

Gone! Gone! Oh, youth! Oh, moon! Oh, afternoon! Now evening is descending.

As I grow older, it seems that the sands of time are running through the hourglass with an ever-increasing pace. I suppose it’s only natural with advancing age knocking on my door, and having passed the crest of the hill, that the idea of one’s own mortality comes more clearly into focus.

“I hope and wait,” as humanist Robert Ingersoll once noted.

I do know, however, that long past are conversations with many old friends. Recently, two of my high school classmates parted company for the last time. A month before that, another lifelong friend entered the realm of eternal silence.

When struck with melancholy on such occasions, I’m reminded of an old Ray Price song: “How time turns the pages and life goes so fast, the years turn the black hair to gray — I’ll never again turn the young ladies’ heads, I’ll go running off into the wind, I’m three quarters home from the start to the end, I wish I was 18 again.”

I think when it comes to the question of life and death, the Great Ag-

nostic from Peoria had it right: “I am perfectly satisfied that the highest possible philosophy is to enjoy today, not regretting yesterday, and not fearing tomorrow. So, let us suck this orange of life dry, so that when death comes to call, we can politely say to him, you are welcome to the peelings, what little there was we have enjoyed.”

Florida

## Court ruling on serving LGBTQ people was wrong

The Supreme Court ruled that a public business can refuse to serve LGBTQ-plus people. So, is it just LGBTQ-plus people that the business can discriminate against? Or do they get to pick and choose?

Who is next? If you have a public business, you should not get to discriminate. The ruling by the Supreme Court is wrong!

Pennsylvania

## Sadness, calmness on death of James Haught

James Haught’s writing enriched my life. His columns were full of interesting facts and well-phrased logic and humor. I always felt I could see the man himself behind the words, smiling. The news of his death [See Page 1.] has affected me deeply, both with an aching sadness and with an inexplicable calmness and joy.

California

## More should incorporate Thomas Merton’s quote

Kansas state Sen. Mark Steffen’s statement that he’d be “happy to convert anybody” to Christianity reminds me of this gem written by the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, which I wish all religious proselytizers could incorporate in their appraisals of others: “The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise, we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.”

California

‘IN Science WE TRUST’  
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## Ellery Schempp article taught me more history

Thank you for printing Lewis Beale’s great article on Ellery Schempp in the June/July issue. I enjoyed reading about him and the history of the atheist movement as I sipped tea from my Enlightening Bug mug. As a Pennsylvania native and lifelong atheist, it is always nice to learn more about our history.

Pennsylvania

## Bible filled with ‘woke’ verses and parables

Certain people are having a hissy fit over “woke culture” regarding people who are “different.” Maybe they should look to their bible a bit. For instance, in Matthew 19:12 it says, “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth,” which contradicts verse 4: “made them male and female.” Then verse 12 says “let anyone accept this who can.”

Oh, really? Accept which teaching? That nonbinary people exist from birth, even in ancient times? Or that everyone is either male or female?

And some early Christians actually believed the Book of Thomas 114:1-3: “Make Mary leave us, for females don’t deserve life.” Jesus said, “Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of Heaven.”

Then the apologists open their big mouths and say that this verse is only metaphorical, and it didn’t really mean what it says. Just like Jesus tried to confuse people through parables, to hide the “true meaning.” And “tell no one about this miracle that I just performed.”

The Church just votes out passages that they don’t like, or goes through tortured “logic and sermons” to twist some new meaning out of old canards. And if you don’t like the meaning, just shout: “We will destroy the woke!” Sure.

Indiana

## Dog is my (unfortunately short-lived) co-pilot

I turned 80 this year. I have always told people who questioned my being a nonbeliever that I had proof there was no such thing as an all-knowing entity/god. I figured, before I flame out, I’d pass it along. There cannot be a “creator” and the proof is that no omniscient god would give a lifespan of 150 years to a tortoise and just 10 years to a dog! Amen!

Arizona

## Are there reasonable, literate God-believers?

I thoroughly enjoy every issue of Freethought Today because it is well-written, informative and enlightening. I find myself reading it front to back, and I especially like the Black Collar Crime section.

However, I have begun to wonder if, along with the wacky mail and online comments you receive and publish in the Crankmail section, there are any reasonably intelligent observations from deeply religious, die-hard worshippers of God who have managed to illustrate their point of view in a smattering of well-constructed prose?

It seems that there must be at least a handful of believers out there who are able to express themselves coherently and with somewhat less vitriol.

Furthermore, I am always amazed that those who nonsensically rant and

rave, display so much illiteracy, and how they nearly always begin from a defensive position; they always claim an absolute certainty about God’s existence (not to mention Satan’s), and they often savagely attack the FFRF in what I assume is a desperate — albeit feeble — attempt to illustrate the organization’s “cluelessness.” I have asked myself why these types of people seem to care so deeply — or pretend to — about what dreadful fate awaits all of us nonbelievers?

Illinois

## Ronald Reagan sometimes said the right things

I am no fan of President Reagan, but many times he did know how to say the right things at the right times. On Oct. 26, 1984, just before he won reelection, he gave a speech at a Jewish temple on Long Island. The following are edited excerpts from that speech to Temple Hillel in Valley Stream, New York:

“We in the United States . . . were founded as a nation of openness to people of all beliefs. And so we must remain. Our very unity has been strengthened by our pluralism. We establish no religion in this country, we command no worship, we mandate no belief, nor will we ever. Church and state are, and must remain, separate. All are free to believe or not believe, all are free to practice a faith or not, and those who believe are free, and should be free, to speak of and act on their belief. . .

“The ideals of our country leave no room whatsoever for intolerance, for anti-Semitism, or bigotry of any kind — none. . .

“We must never remain silent in the face of bigotry. We must condemn those who seek to divide us. In all quarters and at all times, we must

Write to us

To send a letter to the editor for Freethought Today, please email it to [editor@ffrf.org](mailto:editor@ffrf.org).

teach tolerance and denounce racism, anti-Semitism, and all ethnic or religious bigotry wherever they exist as unacceptable evils. We have no place for haters in America — none, whatsoever.”

Massachusetts

## FFRF San Fran chapter, member helped us out

This note is an appreciation for help I received from the San Francisco Bay Area Chapter of FFRF and from one of its members, Craig Haggart. I sent an email to the chapter when my wife was scheduled for surgery over 700 miles from home. Craig’s information regarding hotels and local transportation issues made the trip significantly easier. I appreciate the help.

FFRF Valley of the Sun Chapter

P.S. Sherron’s surgery went well and now she just needs time to heal to see the benefits.

## Freethought Today gives me reason for renewal

I really enjoy Freethought Today, especially the cryptogram puzzle. And, I hope you have another six-word stories contest soon. I have one to add: First gods, then god, then none. [See Page 2.]

I just renewed my membership. Keep up the good work.

California

# CRANKMAIL

Here is the latest installment of Crankmail, where we print some of the correspondence we get from our detractors. Printed as received.

**Science:** A home is designed and built. Did the universe just come together? I tutored high school science students. During biology class I asked students questions concerning evolution. One question I asked was, “Did anyone see a person evolve from an animal?” Students answered, “No.” Science is observable and repeatable. Valid science takes no faith. I worked as a chemical engineer. I know science well. It takes a lot of faith to believe in evolution. I deem most atheist think evolution is true. Atheist do not understand science. — Daniel Reuter

**Bible:** Quran Chapter. 3 verse 44 , 45. ; — Oh you Muslim who Cannot read his Quran , and believe the word of His Allah, Read !!! and be put

Crossword answers

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
13													
16													
	19			20			21	22					
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25	26	27	28			29		30		31	32	33	34
35			36			37		38		39			
40					41			42		43			
44				45		46				47			
48				49		50				51		52	
				53		54		55		56			
57	58	59	60					61			62	63	
64						65	66			67			68
69						70				71			
72						73				74			

to Shame. ,!! You receit your Quran from Cover, to Cover. Yet you do understand the Contents. JESUS is the WORD Of God, The SPIRIT of GOD, JESUS CHRIST. God Created the World Wit h The Word, Jesus Is Sinless, Is Alive, Will Come Back, Will Judge The World .He is The Messaih. Mohammed and The Allah of Mohammed ,came. 600 yrs After Christ. — Trudy James

**Moses:** I’m just going to be very blunt you are an a\*\*\*\*\*. Before Moses went up to the mountain he asked all of the people of Israel will you follow the Lord will you do all that He commands they said we will do all he commands. And so Moses commanded them all to stay there and wait what happened when Moses got back they violated what he had said and they had done evil. So he broke the tablets went up to the mountain and got new ones and these ones had even more than just Ten Commandments on them. This is because if you study Paul which again you don’t read the Bible or study you’re just a stupid academic. The law was not a good thing it was a curse on Israel because they could not fulfill the law this is why Christ came to redeem them from the curse of the law. Again these types of guys who are just trying to show off their intelligence only prove how absolutely stupid they are — Tim

Cryptogram answer

As more people become more intelligent, they care less for preachers and more for teachers.

—Robert G. Ingersoll

othy Peckinpah

**Spiritual world:** Atheism is usually fairly smart Individuals trying to make physical since of a spiritual reality. Simple truth is God is a Spirit, requires one to seek the Spirit world. I wonder if atheists believe in witchcraft? Same kind of worship required to seek Gods Spirit but on the good, not evil! — Joseph Calvert

**Terrorists!:** I am not a Christian, I am concerned about your attacks on them. Do you not comprehend what’s going on in our country□you’re HELPING TERRORIST GROUPS.who’s the Muslims main targets □ this country was founded by a value system with heavy emphasis on the Bible. What really burns my ass is the fact that most of your members are WHITE. THANKS SO MUCH.... UNBELIEVABLE.. — Greg Jurgensen

**No hope:** You have a lot to answer for. every person that you influence to turn away from our living God is a measure of the damage he’s causing. you a peddler of a no hope scenario for peoples’ lives. You preach that we don’t know where we came from, we have to stumble through this miserable existence called life, and then can’t give anyone any hope as to what happens once people die...on the other hand, God has told us where we came from, is there to help us navigate through this present existence, and guarantees us eternal life through His precious son Jesus when we depart this present earthly existence... no prize for guessing whom I’m putting my trust in.... — Eddie Felder II

**Evidence:** .5 billion years ago that’s an extraordinary claim and it needs extraordinary evidence, you have also agreed that it rained on the rocks for millions of years that’s an extraordinary claim which needs extraordinary evidence, you

said humans and chimpanzees have a common ancestor that is an extraordinary claim which needs extraordinary evidence what is that ancestor, you also said we are the ancestors of fish that is an extraordinary claim and needs extraordinary evidence, then you said everything came out of the sea that means whales used to be on the sea then grew legs and went to the land and then went back to the sea that is an extraordinary claim and needs extraordinary evidence, you are in La La Land — Russell Baker

**I have rights!:** the only thing I see wrong is you are telling me that I have no religious rights or freedoms....that is bull shit....I will tell you what you have NO RIGHT to tell me how I should live or worship or vote or rally in my congressnal district....IF you want to live like that then move to south America, or Russia or any other country that has got rid of religious beliefs or better yet become a communist become a muslem or just plain don’t be a member of anything but don’t tell me how I should live my life!!!! — Cliff Benafor

**God is good:** The Lord God is simply and succinctly reiterating His superior, transcending Sovereignty and Omnipotence. Just as He bestows peace to the just, He rewards the unjust with the deserved punishment of evil. Confusion is not God’s intention, purpose, His way of working, nor is He pleased with it. The fact that He at times allows something unpalatable to happen (because He is Almighty, Omnipotent and could have prevented it in the first place), does not make Him its originator and author. Will you do some simple research on the synonyms and antonyms of the word “worship”? It’s very enlightening. — Angela Benavides





Monona Terrace Convention Center  
The Monona Terrace Convention Center will host FFRF’s national convention.

# FFRF convention, Oct. 13-15

# Ready for Madison?!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in its home city for its 46th annual convention from Friday, Oct. 13 through Sunday morning Oct. 15 at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison, Wis. For information on convention speakers, see page 3.

## General Schedule

The convention will offer an optional Thursday afternoon open house at the Freethought Hall, running from 4–6 p.m. Convention registration will re-open at 8 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 13, with the program beginning at 9 a.m. and running through Saturday evening. On Sunday morning, the membership and State Representatives meetings will take place, ending by noon.

Return the handy registration form on the right, or sign up at [ffrf.org/convo2023](https://ffrf.org/convo2023).

## Registration

Registration for the convention is only \$100 per FFRF member, \$105 for a companion accompanying a member, \$160 for nonmembers (or, you can save money by becoming a

member for just \$40). High school students or younger are free and the college student rate is \$25. Registration deadline is Sept. 29.

## Optional Group Meals

Vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options are available. Please specify requirements on the registration form.

### Friday Dinner Buffet

- Beer Brats with Wisconsin Sauerkraut
- Grilled Chicken Breast
- Black Bean Burgers
- Baked Beans
- Assorted Wisconsin Salads

### Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

- Cheese and Chive Scrambled Eggs
- Applewood Smoked Bacon
- Baby Red Potatoes
- Muffins

### Saturday Lunch

- Two Chicken Enchiladas
- Refried Beans
- Fiesta Corn
- Spanish Rice

### Saturday Dinner

- Wisconsin Cranberry Chicken
- Champagne Tilapia
- Portobello Wellington
- Dessert trio

## Hotels

We encourage you to register and book your hotel rooms as soon as possible.

If you need an accessible room, please state your needs when making the reservation.

Make your room reservation directly by phoning or find online links at [ffrf.us/hotels2023](https://ffrf.us/hotels2023). (See information below). Indicate you are with “The Freedom From Religion Foundation” block.

The **Hilton Madison Monona Terrace** (9 East Wilson Street Madison, Wis., 53703 608-255-5100) attached to convention site, is sold out of FFRF’s room block. Some other rooms are still available.

Onsite self parking is \$25/day.

### Best Western Premier Park Hotel

22 S Carroll St, Madison, WI 53703  
608-285-8000  
Rates are \$209 for a standard guest room.  
Hotel is 3 blocks from convention site.  
Onsite valet parking is \$25/day.  
Reserve by Sept. 11.

### Sheraton Madison Hotel

706 John Nolen Dr, Madison, WI 53713  
888-625-4988  
Rates are \$269 for a standard guest room.  
Hotel is 2.3 miles from convention site.  
Free surface lot parking. Free shuttle service to downtown available.  
Reserve by Sept. 20.

FFRF 2023

NATIONAL CONVENTION

MADISON OCTOBER 13–15

46<sup>TH</sup> CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: [ffrf.us/convention2023](https://ffrf.us/convention2023)

REGISTRATION FEES	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___	\$100 \$___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___	\$105 \$___
Child (High school or under accompanying registrant)	___	Free \$___
College Student with ID	___	\$25 \$___
Non-member	___	\$160 \$___
<input type="checkbox"/> Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$20)	___	\$140 \$___

### OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

We’ve provided meals with the most commonly requested dietary preferences. Please specify other requirements below under ADA or food allergy accommodations. FFRF does not make money on convention meals. Prices include the 5.5% sales tax and 22% service charge.

#### Thursday, October 12

**Freethought Hall Open House** [Must register to attend] \_\_\_ Free  
Check box if attending ☐ Registrant 1 ☐ Registrant 2

#### Friday, October 13

**Friday Dinner Buffet** \_\_\_ \$35 \$\_\_\_  
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free  
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

#### Saturday, October 14

**Non-Prayer Breakfast** \_\_\_ \$25 \$\_\_\_  
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free  
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

**Enchilada Platter** \_\_\_ \$25 \$\_\_\_  
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free  
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

**Saturday Dinner** \_\_\_ \$50 \$\_\_\_  
Registrant 1 ☐ Wisconsin Cranberry Chicken ☐ Champagne Tilapia ☐ Vegetable Portobello  
Registrant 2 ☐ Wisconsin Cranberry Chicken ☐ Champagne Tilapia ☐ Vegetable Portobello

► Total \$\_\_\_

☐ I am adding a donation to sponsor student convention scholarships. \$\_\_\_

Please tell us about any ADA or food allergy accommodations needed in order to fully participate.

(Make checks payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:  
**FFRF, Attn: Convention | P.O. Box 750 | Madison, WI 53701**  
☐ I attest that I and my guests will be fully vaccinated for Covid-19 as of 9/28/23.  
☐ I attest that I have a physician’s order against my vaccination.

Name of Registrant 1

Name of Registrant 2  
☐ I am including additional registrants (enclose your additional list, with meals, if any).

Address

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Phone\* Email\*

Credit Card Number Expiration Date / Security Code

Billing Name / Signature \*Contact information for in-house use only  
Registration deadline September 29th, 2023 (Unless event is sold out)  
Registration cancellations received after September 29th will not be refunded.