

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER EVENTS

MIAMI: Sunday, December 19, Meet & eat, 2:00-4:00 pm. at "Mi Peru" restaurant in SkyLake Mall. FMI: Patrick Bens, 305/940-0442 or 954/929-0441. atheist1@bellsouth.net
Singles Happy Hour—each Wednesday from 4-5pm at the Caddy Shack pub & Grill, 315 S. 62nd Ave. Hollywood (located between 441 and Turnpike exit 49). For directions, call Rich, Mary, or Donna at the restaurant 954/985-5655.

PALM BEACH: Third Sunday of each month at 1:00pm at Piccadilly Cafeteria, northeast corner of Summit Blvd. and Military Trail—just behind McDonald's. For more info, call Charles Schisler at 561/627-6340 or 561/624-9359.

Book Fair

continued from page 1

Could the U.S. be blocking imports of atheist books?

Christos agrees with me that we must purchase and keep a good number of Spanish atheist books in stock. I will redo my best in researching who has translations of Russell and Twain. This is a #1 priority.

I agree with Charles Schisler that Atheists of Florida, Inc. must issue its own (annual)



Jim Young and Ed Golly at the Circus McGurkis stand.

TAMPA: Saturday, January 29, noon to 1:30. **NEW LOCATION**—Community room at Dillard's Department Store, second level, Parkside Mall (formerly Pinellas Square Mall), SW corner of US19 and Park Blvd. FMI: Ed Golly—813/839-7567 or Jerry Moore—727/526-4223

book(s). In my opinion, an anthology of our own essays, poems and book reviews, seasoned with famous quotes and cartoons, will educate both groups above-mentioned.

Finally, I agree with most of the curious who visit our booth that the show must go on. Our presence at the Miami Book Fair International is a must. A large proportion of the public needs our alternative plug-in, needs our books that are free from religious irk and needs to communicate with real people who enjoy a secular *Weltanschauung* (German for "Look upon the world").

A of F at Circus McGurkis

—Ed Golly

Ed Corl continues to set up our weekly appearance at the Elm Street Flea Market on the Tampa campus of the University of South Florida, assisted by Britt Girard.

In November our stand appeared at the Circus McGurkis, which is held each year on the last Saturday of October. Since that clashed with our regular meeting schedule, we cancelled the meeting and headed for Lakeshore Park on the north shore of Lake Maggorie in south Pinellas County. McGurkis is billed as a people's fair, which means just about anything goes. A of F was bunched in with Americans United, the ACLU, the Socialists, some environmentalists, and the like.

A steady stream of people stopped by the stand to sign up to receive our newsletter and pick up literature. Manning the table was Jim Young, Jacques Musy, Ed Corl, Jerry Moore and Ed Golly. About 45 names were added to our mailing list. Each will receive the next three issues of our newsletter and some additional information about A of F. After the three issues, we send a membership application with an invitation to join. If we don't hear back, their names are dropped.

We are still seeking a similar event in the Orlando area **A** to start to pick up members there.

10 December 1999

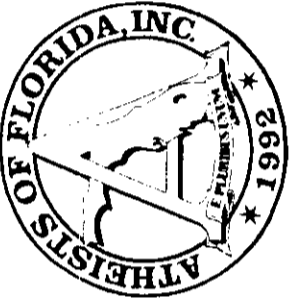


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December, 1999

Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church
A Member Society of the ATHEIST ALLIANCE, the Democratic Alliance of Autonomous Atheist Societies

1999 Miami Book Fair International

—by Patrick Bens, Chapter director
Dade&Broward.

MIAMI—It all started when life member Kyoko Brogdon handed me a check covering the rent of a booth at the Miami Book Fair International. From that day on preparations for the event took little more than enthusiasm and time to accomplish what over the week-end of November 19, 20, 21 resulted in the best recruitment drive in the history of our group.

Friday, before dawn, I was unloading at our designated tent #268 at the Wolfson Campus. By 9 a.m. everything was ready and already several people, mostly merchants, came to investigate what our stall was about.

By noontime our founder, Christos Tzantakos arrived with our president, Ed Golly, Nan Owens, and Jim Young who had flown in from Tampa. They manned the booth Friday afternoon and all day Saturday. Palm Beach Chapter Director Charles Schisler assisted Friday and Dade&Broward Chapter Secretary Patricia Elkins helped out Saturday afternoon.

Sunday, it was my turn again. Christos was there first, opening the tent and soon, despite many short rain showers, book lovers by the dozens started to drop by, browsing eagerly.

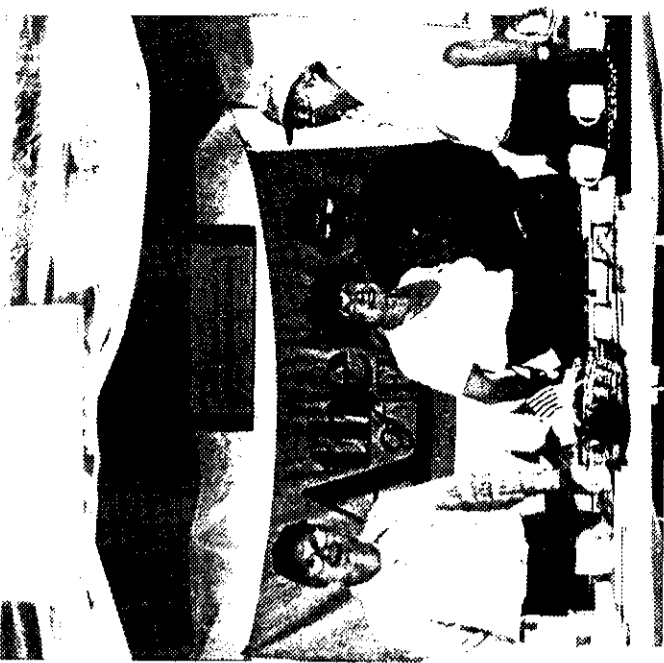
After Christos returned home to Fort Pierce, new member Joe Abels, along with my daughters, helped me out for several hours trying to tame the theists, including one irate elderly member of the Nation of Islam. Thanks, Joe!

Besides the unwavering classic *Why I Am Not a Christian* by Bertrand Russell and the gutsy *Letters from the Earth* by Mark Twain, Jim Young's own *An Ounce of Reason*, and Rebeca Porto's donated copies of *Science and Creationism*, our booth offered newsletters, *NewsNotes*, pamphlets and illustrated quotes to fulfill the intellectual hunger. If we had had more titles, more books could have been sold. Our three copies of *The V-rated Bible* vanished in about an hour. That and *The Bible Handbook* top the list of demands.

A banner sporting Jesse Ventura's anti-clerical "*Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for the weak-minded who need strength in numbers*" (from the November 99 *Playboy* Interview) drew lots of positive comments. The pamphlet *15 Reasons why*

Beer is better than God drew lots of spontaneous laughter. And print-outs from *primenet.com* drew noscs closer to statements by Jodie Foster, Monica Lowensky and others as to why they are not religious.

All in all, our participation at the Book Fair is a must. Loads of people need us, need our alternative



Miami Book Fair stand. From left, Jim Young, Nan Owens, Patrick Bens and Ed Golly

literature and need to reassure themselves that there is a group of sane witmongers by whom they can reload their batteries.

Especially among two groups did we score high. On Friday, school kids stormed our booth with questions like: "What is Atheist?" When I answered: "A person who lives without religion" this girl's eyes opened wide and her whole being fell silent, as if she was wondering what the word *religion* meant.

Another group we have to focus on more seriously in the future is the group that represents just about half of the population of Dade County: the Latin-Americans. Year after year, we are approached by more and more Brazilians. This year, the inquiries from Hispanics was just overwhelming.

While the "weak-minded" in the Hispanic community cross over from boring catholicism to charismatic protestantism, the intellectuals are desperately searching for alternative groups like ours. It was a real shame that we had NO single book in Spanish to offer for sale! For an entire year, I have been combing the Internet for Bertrand Russell's *Por que no soy cristiano*. So far I only found one copy in French... Contacts were made with www.edhisa.es, a publishing house in Madrid to purchase at least a dozen. A reply message stated that the book cannot be exported to the U.S. Yet from sources in Spain I know that there is no censorship in Spain. Spain has more freethinkers per capita than the U.S. So why can't I get these volumes?

(See Book Fair back page)

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 Established eight times a year by Atheists of Florida, Inc., a non-profit, educational Corporation founded to heighten public awareness about atheism, monitor state church separation issues, and provide intellectually stimulating contacts for the membership.

Membership dues
 Member \$ 500.00
 Sustaining 50.00 yr
 Couple 40.00 yr
 Individual 30.00 yr
 Student (under 25 yrs.) 10.00 yr
 Newsletter (out of state) 10.00 yr

Send newsletter correspondence to Tampa Bay Chapter, address above. The A of F newsletter is provided free to our members as a medium of exchange. Letters from our members are published on a space-available basis. Articles may be edited for clarity or length. Atheists of Florida, Inc. is a Member Society of the national Atheist Alliance.

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A RECENT INQUIRY to Atheists of Florida, Captain Wesley Blank of Bradenton, was sent a membership application last month. It came back without a check. On the back was a note he had scribbled explaining why he had decided not to join.

Message from the President Yer missin' the boat, Cap'n Blank

—Ed Golly

Blank's comments gave me pause to realize we may not be successfully convey-

ing our message to other atheists about the underlying reasons they should consider membership. Our introduction letter tells the "who" and "what," but apparently not the "why."

"I am satisfied...that I am comfortable being an Atheist. However...I do not try to crusade for Atheism," wrote Captain Blank. Neither do we, Wes. In fact, most atheists realize that efforts to proselytize to religionists are utterly futile. Reason and blind faith mix like bunker C crude and water.

Blank continues: "There has been a chapel at Boston's Logan Airport ever since I worked there in 1949. It hasn't hurt anybody... I once heard a cousin of mine express the same response to the prayer in school issue... "Why not?" she said. "It doesn't hurt 'em."

Nah. Religion, with all its messages of personal inadequacy, sin, divisiveness and guilt can't possibly hurt anybody, can it? Apparently, the idea of government sponsoring religion at the expense of all citizens, even us atheists, doesn't concern you, Captain Blank. Which means you'll be equally undisturbed when the next president starts handing out billions of your tax dollars to "superstition-based" organizations. Both major candidates have announced their intention to do precisely that.

And, since religion is still projected only in a positive light and always assumed to be good for everyone, who will eversee how that money is spent? No religion will tolerate government looking at its books—separation of church and state, remember? So if they claim to spend, say, \$3.50 to provide

a meal for a homeless person and in fact spend, say, 60 cents for that meal, who will know what becomes of the difference? And if the pastor is using it for a Terre Verte mansion or jewelry for his girlfriend, who's gonna know? Certainly not you, Captain Blank.

Have you noticed what's transpired just this year? It has really been a tantamount year for religious intrusion. Your tax dollars are now paying for superstitious "education" in Florida's religious schools. Evolution has been dumped from Kansas schools. Politicians are determined to plaster the ten commandments everywhere.

The Catholic church is taking over the hospitals of our nation and converting health care into religious doctrine. I mentioned this to a passerby at the Miami Book Fair. He shrugged and just allowed that he could always go to a different hospital. But what if your HMO only allows certain hospitals in your plan and they are all controlled by the church? Just sit back and do nothing, Cap'n Blank, and it may happen to you one day. Or do you think this momentum will just fizzle out because the religious right will decide to put the constitution before their god?

Florida's population now stands at about 18-million. Based on people I meet at the public outings and the polls we read, it's not at all inconceivable that we atheists are 20 to 25% of the nation's population. Even using the lower numbers, there are some three and a half million of us in Florida. Just one percent of that number is 35,000. If we could just get one percent of the atheists of Florida to become members of our group, think of the voice we would have! We could have a paid lobbyist in Tallahassee like the ACLU and a paid staff. A newspaper instead of a newsletter.

But unfortunately, there are too many Captain Blanks in the world. I wonder, Wes, if you ever heard of a conversation that went something like this? "The Nazis are necessary to control the Communists." "Who will control the Nazis?" "Don't worry, they're too small to amount to anything."

So is a chapel in the airport, right?

A of F is producing a new sample newsletter. Board member Nan Owens has written the cover page to specifically focus on why atheists should give serious consideration to joining. The remainder of the newsletter is devoted to articles which ran in previous newsletters which dealt with topics that directly affect most of us. The new newsletters will now be available at all our public appearances and be sent to all inquiries to A of F.

removed. "I'm not going to take them down. It's going to take the big man in the black robe to tell me to take them down," said McCrery County Judge-Executive Jimmie Green. "And when he does, he can come take them down himself or send someone because Judge Green is not going to do it."

In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Stone vs. Graham that posting of the commandments in schools amounted to an unconstitutional government promotion of religion. That ruling also grew out of a Kentucky case.

David Friedman, a lawyer for the ACLU, said that posting the commandments "clearly shows governmental favoritism towards specific religious doctrine," and violates the First Amendment decree of separation of state and church.

The three suits, filed in federal court in London, Ky., ask the court to rule that posting the commandments by themselves is unconstitutional. ACLU lawyers said about a dozen Kentucky counties or school districts have posted the commandments, but they decided to narrow the litigation. No monetary damages are sought.

Friedman warned that if the ACLU prevailed in court, and other local governments refused to follow suit, they could face similar legal action. Pulaski County Judge-Executive Darrell Beshears defended the posting of the religious codes in his county's courthouse in southeastern Kentucky. "We're committed to putting them up," he said.

The commandments are displayed in a Pulaski County history exhibit in the foyer of the courthouse in Somerset. The Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights are going to be added, Beshears said. "We don't disagree with anybody else's belief. Absolutely not. They can believe the way they want. But we don't feel like we should forfeit any of our beliefs," Beshears said.

The school suit was filed on behalf of a couple and their child, who attends middle school in the Harlan County district in eastern Kentucky. Friedman said. The family is not identified in the suit to protect the child's privacy.

Displaying an utter lack of civil rights understanding, Don Musselman, superintendent of Harlan County schools, stated: "This is a situation where a small group or a minority is controlling what the majority wants and not letting the majority have what they want. I say it does not hurt the students to see the 10 rules on the walls."

"When government posts the Ten Commandments or a religious text, and only the religious text, it is giving its stamp of approval to a particular religious belief, and that's when it crosses the line," Friedman said.

The ACLU's legal action came two days after about 300 people gathered at the state Capitol in Frankfort to support proposed legislation to let voters in individual school districts decide whether to display the commandments in classrooms. Legislators will have such a bill awaiting them when the General Assembly meets in January.

Summit of superstition
 TALLAHASSEE—Has the name "Bush" come to equate to a total lack of comprehension of the Constitution?

True to his commitment to the religious reich, Florida Gov. Bush held the first Summit of Faith in the Capitol in December. Cast in patriotic themes and bloated with superstitious babble, the event sought to incorporate religion into lawmaking to cure society's "moral decay." The participant list read like a who's who of Florida's religious and political circles.

Bush stood under a life-size portrait of George Washington to encourage us to "love thy neighbor."

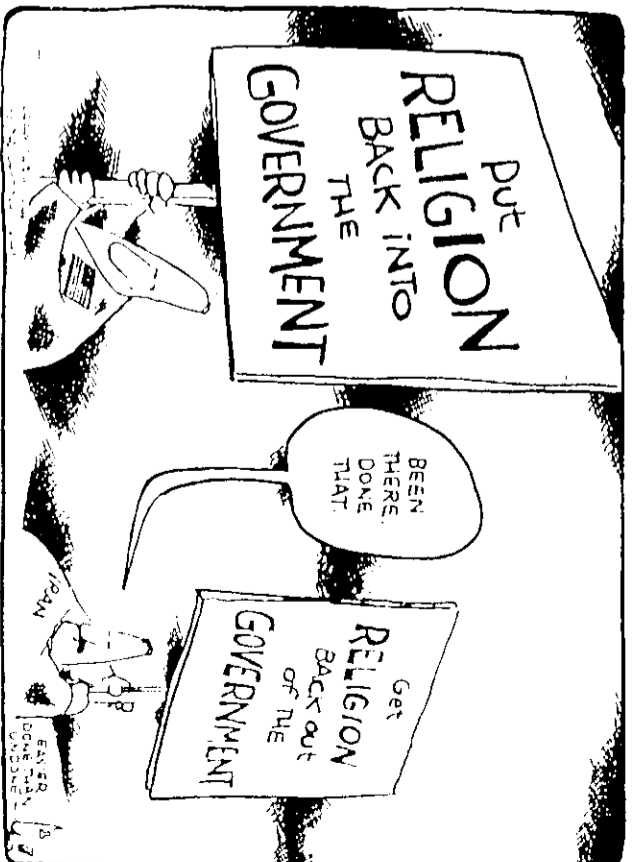
The function was sponsored by Jim Towey, director of the non-profit group Aging with Dignity. Towey was U.S. legal counsel to Mother Teresa. It was the first time the leaders of every branch of state government had gathered in the same room as the leaders of many of the state's religious faiths to talk about god, social problems and what they expect from one another. In other words, it was precisely the type of religious establishment the founding fathers sought to preclude from government.

Although simply talking among one another poses no major concerns, Towey hopes it sets a civil tone for the coming legislative session. Primarily, the summit was mostly a platform for the politicians to make a public declaration of their personal superstitions while lacking any commitment to any particular course of political action.

For example, State House Speaker John Thrasher shared with the group that he sets aside one morning each week during legislative sessions to pray with lawmakers.

Chief Justice Major Harding of the Florida Supreme Court described his daily Scripture readings, something he does with his wife each morning.

While talk remains cheap, the implication that religion should be synonymous with government and citizenship stands as a totally inappropriate misuse of political power.



BY TOWLES FOR THE BUFFALO NEWS

School district, Christian club settle federal lawsuit

A group of Christian athletes has dropped a federal lawsuit against a Florida high school after school officials said the group would now be treated like all student organizations on campus.

In January, a student and her father sued Manatee High School claiming the school's treatment of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes was hostile and therefore in violation of the religious-liberty clauses of the First Amendment and the federal Equal Access Act. That act requires public secondary schools to grant student groups equal access to school facilities and benefits.

Represented by the Liberty Counsel, a conservative Christian group, the student attacked the school's student-group policy as discriminating against religious groups by denying them access to the school intercom and the right to post announcements, publish a group photo in the yearbook and meet on school grounds.

A trial had been set for Nov. 4. Two nights before it was to begin, however, the Manatee County School Board voted to settle the lawsuit and to rewrite its student-group policy to treat the Fellowship of Christian Athletes like all other student groups.

According to the board, the group will now be able to meet on campus, make intercom announcements, have its own school bank account, set up a table to distribute religious tracts during freshman orientation, and have an administrative sponsor. The board also voted to pay \$25,000 for the Liberty Counsel's litigation costs.

Mat Staver, the Liberty Counsel's president, said that while he was pleased with the settlement, he found it disconcerting that it took so long for the board to "recognize equal treatment."

"The only reason I can assume that it took a while for the board to uphold the Equal Access Act is because of political or ideological opposition to certain student clubs," Staver said. "Equal access regarding student religious clubs is a simple and basic concept. The student-initiated, student-led, noncurriculum-related clubs must receive equal treatment regardless of their secular or religious nature."

School Prayer

EVANSVILLE, Ind.—As federal judges debate whether it's constitutional for students to lead group invocations at high school football games, many here are doing just that, despite lawyers' warnings.

"Right before the game is probably the most exciting time in football. It's a little like going off to war. Everybody's got beliefs, and that kind of situation

tends to bring those things out," Evansville North High School Coach Mike Wilson told *The Evansville Courier & Press*.

Wilson said he normally has a student volunteer to lead the pregame prayers. At other schools, coaches take the job.

Evansville football coaches say they have received no complaints about the prayers, but the issue has led to lawsuits elsewhere. The U.S. Supreme Court is considering a Texas case in which a school board is asking the justices to overturn a lower court ruling that said student-led prayers over the public-address system at football games violate the constitutionally required separation of church and state.

The court's decision in the Texas case, *Santa Fe Independent School District vs. Jane Doe*, is expected by late June and could help clarify the jumbled state of the law surrounding school prayer.

Meanwhile, school districts in which teams pray together risk being sued, but coaches and players say it's a tradition they don't want to give up.

At Harrison High School, where the team observes a voluntary pregame prayer led by a player or volunteer, coach Mitch Marsch says it has been a part of his more than 35 years of involvement in football.

"I feel kind of funny if I walk onto a football field without having given thanks for my parents and the people responsible for helping to get me there," said Marsch, who retired recently after 22 years.

"It's a traditional thing," Wilson said. "And as much as it's a religious thing, it's a bonding. We get together, hold hands, and that says we're together in this. Some guys are right in the middle and some will stand at the edges. We just say we'll stay together, and call for a little help from above."

But attorney Patrick Shoulders, who advises the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corp. on legal issues, says coaches who lead, initiate or even encourage their players to pray are probably violating the law.

"The rules apply on the football field and in the locker room the same way they apply in the classroom," said Shoulders.

The Ten Commandments

LOUISVILLE, Ky.—Kentucky has re-emerged as a battleground in the legal fight over posting the Ten Commandments in government buildings.

The dispute pits the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky against two counties and a school district that are displaying the commandments.

The ACLU, which sued the school district and counties in federal court on Nov. 18, views the postings as an improper mixing of church and state. Local officials see nothing wrong with presenting the commandments as a moral compass.

A defiant McCreary County official vowed to keep copies of the commandments on the courthouse wall until a judge orders them taken down and has them

TEN YEARS AGO, when I first moved to Florida, I gained a new appreciation of why they call it the Bible Belt. It certainly gave me a good whipping. It seemed that everywhere I turned Christians insinuated their dogma into civic life.

When I registered to vote, my polling place was first a Baptist Church, then, The Salvation Army. No one else seemed to find this strange. Later, at a Neighbor-

Prayer in Court

—Gael Murphy

hood Watch meeting, also held in a church, the proceedings were interrupted by the minister with a rousing prayer to Jesus. All joined in—all but me. I raised my hand. "Sir, I wasn't informed that there would be a prayer service tonight. Could it please be held after the civic Neighborhood Watch Meeting is over? Not all your neighbors share your religion." He held off the prayer, but the "congregation", especially the Church Ladies, glared daggers at me through the remainder of the meeting. Needless to say, these paragons of christian charity did not invite me to share refreshments with them later.

The first time I was summoned to be a juror, the prayer at the end of the swearing-in oath took me by surprise. I made a vow of my own. I would do all in my power so that citizens of Hillsborough County would not have to pray to be on a jury. I called the judges and wrote them letters. Mr. Roland, Judge Dennis Alvarez's clerk, called on his behalf to give me the judge's reply. He said that I could go to the clerk in the front, after the swearing-in, and ask for an alternate affirmation.

But, he said, the standard oath would remain the same for the other jurors. I sent him back to the judge with the message that I wanted the standard oath changed for all prospective jurors—not just myself.

A few days later, Mr. Roland called back to tell me that the judges had met to discuss my letters. He apologized for the way I was treated by the court clerks, and said that a new affirmation had been written and would now be standard for swearing in jurors.

Yesterday, I completed my jury duty. The jury was sworn in three times. The last time we were sworn in, the court clerk added "...so help me God." I approached the bench and told the judge, "I was told we would not have to pray to be on the jury." She told the errant clerk to read the affirmation again without the prayer.

Dear Fellow Freethinkers, I am so very pleased to announce to you, no citizen in Hillsborough County shall ever again be required to pray to be a juror! Following is the letter that seemed to work the magic OOPS! Sorry, we don't believe in magic!

Your Honor, Judge Alvarez, I have been again called for jury duty. I am happy to serve our community in this small way. This is not a

request to be excused. There is, though, a Constitutional problem, which I would like you to address before my Jury Summons date of November 15, 1999.

Several years ago I responded to a Jury Summons. In the Courthouse the jurors assembled and were told to repeat after the clerk an oath to tell the truth. At the end of the oath was a prayer asking God to help us tell the truth. "So, help me, God."

I approached the clerk to tell her I did not say this oath and prayer. I asked her for an alternate way of promising to tell the truth without my being required to pray. She became confused and said that because the oath said "vow or affirm" that it was OK. I tried to explain that it might be OK for Jehovah's Witnesses but not for those, like myself, who do not believe in the Judeo-Christian god. She was unable or unwilling to understand me. She insisted there was no prayer in the oath. I was not chosen for jury duty.

I called and spoke with Cindy Williams, Deputy Clerk of the Circuit Court. She said a prayer to me thanking God that I was forced to pray to become a juror. Today, I spoke with Judge Greco's clerk, Michelle. It is his court for which I was summoned. She laughed at me, refused to give him a message from me, and said that my concern was "ridiculous."

Sir, my concern is not a petty one. I am a citizen of the U.S.A. Certainly, even here in the Bible belt, U.S. citizens have the protection of the Constitution. No one should be required to pray to be a juror. No one should have to stand before hundreds of people to ask for special dispensation from reciting the prayers of another's religion.

The prayer should be removed from the standard oath not just for me, but for all prospective jurors. If I am not selected for a jury, must I think it is because I am not a Christian? Are Hindus, Atheists, Jaines, Animists, Freethinkers, and Agnostics not allowed to serve on a jury unless they lie, and parrot a prayer to a god in whom they do not believe?

I wish to do my civil duty and serve as a juror. I do not wish to be forced to pray for the privilege. Please respond, Your Honor, November 15th is soon, and this matter weighs on my mind Sincerely,

Gael R. Murphy Juror # 744

There is work yet to be done to remove religion from the court room. Witnesses and defendants are still sworn in with a prayer. Since the judges agreed with the principle that jurors should not be required to pray, surely it should apply to defendants and witnesses, who are even more vulnerable when called to testify. They too must be relieved of the requirement to pray. When I asked Mr. Roland, Judge Alvarez's clerk, why anyone should be required to say an oath to God in the court room, he replied, "Believers would feel that unless they said an oath to God, they would not have to tell the truth." I responded, "So, you think atheists are more likely to tell the truth than christians are."

She said a prayer to me thanking God that I was forced to pray to become a juror.

Gael Murphy works with Florida Voices for Animals. Due to her limited income, she has been nominated for an honorary membership in Atheists of Florida.

NEWSFILES

"I'm not going to take them down. It's going to take the big man in the black robe to tell me to take them down."

This is a topic that should be treated as seriously as sexual or racial harassment. It may include many forms of offensive behavior.

Religious Harassment

—Ed Corl

AN EXAMPLE OF RELIGIOUS HARASSMENT was reported early this year in the *St. Petersburg Times*. Ms. Karen Paschnik, a 30 year old single mother of three young children was serving a 15-24 month sentence in the Lucerne Co. (PA) jail for selling cocaine and driving with a suspended license. She informed prison authorities that she was pregnant and wanted an abortion. Worn down by months of religious harassment, she changed her mind. In prison and out she and her children, especially the eldest seven-year-old Jayne, were hounded. "Someone came up to Jayne and told her I was going to kill her unborn baby brother or sister and maybe I would kill her next" said Paschnik. "There was a baby doll with a knife in it, left on my porch, and in

Seven Gross, have brought suit against the university after years of discrimination. Rowsey would coerce workers to pray and penalized those who refused. Rowsey distributed a memorandum that warned the faculty that secularism "is the most destructive influence in our civilization." He displayed religious icons and sent religious publications to his staff. Faculty members were ridiculed and received unfavorable evaluations if they did not participate in religious rituals and prayers. The university was aware of Dr. Rowsey's practices but felt "they couldn't appropriately address this concern." Once the suit was brought against him, Rowsey resigned as department chair. The professors received a substantial monetary settlement in the case.

In the chemical engineering industry, this author was religiously harassed. My manager would wear a large gold cross in the lapel of his suit coat. At every meeting this manager would wear his coat to display the religious idol. I was aware that the manager knew that I was not a Christian and wondered whether the manager would promote Christians over myself. One could not help but fixate on this cross.

his good graces for your job's sake and you oblige against your will.

Visual forms of harassment—displaying religious idols i.e. a 2,000 year old dead Jew on a cross, posters like the bleeding heart of Jesus looking down on a meeting area of workers, the 10 commandments in a public building such as a courtroom.

Inciting harassment—Aiding, inciting or coercing another person or persons to engage in discriminatory practices against the non-religious.

Since I have a rebellious nature I decided to retaliate. On my credenza I displayed a stack of *American Atheist* magazines. The managers eyes almost popped out of his head when he first observed them. He would not come into my office any longer and our relationship chilled. A mini worker-manager religious war began that undermined the effectiveness of our working relationship. The manager was clearly harassed by what I displayed, yet he never understood why his gold cross bothered people. He thought of himself superior to pagans because of his beliefs.

Imagine sending your child to an after-school program to find out he was religiously harassed by an older child. This happened to JJ, a third-grader. JJ's parents sent him to an after-school program because his friends were there, not out of need. JJ is an Atheist and will tell people he does not believe in god if asked. A fifth-grader "befriends" JJ. They play together after school and at each other's house. Everything is fine until the fifth-grader finds out that JJ believes there is no god. The fifth-grader then harasses JJ three to four



Castle

Minnesota Atheists, a member society of Atheist Alliance, responded to the Jesse Ventura incident with a quarter page ad in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. Their December, '99 newsletter followed up on the results.

"Mad as Hell" ad an astounding success!

—Marie Alena Castle

OCTOBER 8 we ran an ad in the *Star Tribune* which responded to Gov. Ventura's comments about religion. The ad suggested that religious people who were calling the governor an intolerant bigot should examine their own practice of slandering atheists. This has been a most astounding and gratifying experience for Minnesota Atheists!

Minnesota Atheists had accumulated an Opportunity Fund designed to provide ready capital for just such an occasion.

The response was tremendous! The ad cost us \$3,449.25. So far we have received \$6,675 in donations! Some from Christians! Individual donations

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ranged from very large to very small. Some donors expressed regret that they could not give larger amounts. We heard from many people unknown to us, and from all over the country. The written and verbal responses were ecstatic. The ad expressed a "mad as hell and won't take it anymore" approach to

religious-right assaults on decency, honesty and fairness. It works. It has been energizing! We are analyzing what went on here so we can tap into that energy to advance our cause. What seems most obvious is this:

We were forceful in sticking up for ourselves. This gets respect and deserves respect. Too often unbelievers adopt a kind of "Please sir, don't hit me" attitude in dealing with religion and just take the slurs and slander and attacks on our democratic freedoms lying down.

We were timely. The issue was being widely discussed so we jumped in quickly.

We directed our anger at the religious right. The lack of outrage from religionists says something

By running a very large ad in the state's largest newspaper, we sent a message that we are a credible, established organization and people can support us in confidence.

We thanked the Christian supporters publicly, as they deserved to be.

Putting our money where our mouth is pays off if we have a forceful message. Talking to ourselves is enjoyable as well as necessary for our own education, but we can never stop there—we need to reach out to the general public. We do that through our TV project, web site, August Berkshire's high school presentations, many letters and commentaries to newspapers, and participation in community events. We are working on a radio project. We look forward to having our own building in the not too distant future, which will enable us to have many more highly visible community activities and member support programs. With the success of this ad project, we plan to do more such bold and proud actions.

Marie Castle is president of Atheist Alliance and president of Minnesota Atheists. She may be reached at mac@mtn.org

Mark Twain Scholarship Raffle

Now is the time for the annual Mark Twain Scholarship Raffle. Over 200 mailings were sent out to raise money for the fund. This year we will be awarding \$1,600 in scholarship grants. And, it's not too late to get your ticket. The drawing will be held in February, 2000 so, hurry!

Many thanks to the following contributors to date:

Name	Amount	No. of Tickets
1 Alex Gribko	\$10.00	2
2 Barry A. Rowe	5.00	1
3 Andrew J. Hershell	25.00	5
4 Edwin A. Corl	10.00	2
5 Thomas J. O'Neil	15.00	3
6 Harold C. Wiedeman	10.00	2
7 James A. Williams	25.00	5
8 Bruce Gregg	25.00	5
9 Wilma E. Pearce	5.00	1
10 Ceil Moore	25.00	5
11 Herbert E. Williams	5.00	1
12 Maria Richardson	25.00	5
13 Peter N. Rummel	10.00	2
14 Peter A. Castelvechi	25.00	5
15 Charles Coryn	20.00	4
16 Patricia Elkins	5.00	1
17 Kyoko H. Brogdon	100.00	20
18 Brent Yaciw	5.00	1

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MARY BENNETT HUDSON

Three ophthalmology professors have resigned from the University of South Florida's Ophthalmology Department because the chairman, Dr. Rowsey, religiously harassed them.

Two of the doctors, Dr. Robert Urban and Dr.

times a day at school. He would wait until JJ was alone, then he would ask him why he didn't believe in god. JJ would hold his own and tell the fifth-grader there was no god. Next, the fifth-grader would tell JJ that all he has to do is believe that Jesus died on the cross and he would go to heaven. JJ found the fifth-graders constant badgering very annoying and repeatedly told them to leave him alone. Since the verbal harassment didn't convert JJ, the fifth-grader resorted to threats of violence. On two occasions he physically hurt JJ and would say, "I'm gonna kill you, I'm gonna kill you". He also persuaded other children to harass JJ for being a non-believer. It is unfortunate that this child waited too long to confide in his parents or notify a counselor immediately at the time of the seriousness of the abuse. Something certainly should have been done with this religiously addicted fifth-grader. Since religion is a socially accepted addiction is it OK to try and addict others? Let's treat it like other addictions.

Are the above examples protected speech or just teasing? I think these are irritating and provocative; the individuals and organizations that allow them should be held responsible for peer harassment. The bullying that the Christians practice, through word and deed as they portray themselves as superior with this "knowledge of truth," is indeed harassment.

When those in charge (parents, companies and schools) do not address these problems, we must take them to court as consistently as is being done in sexual and racial harassment cases. The standard should be that the harassment is not just obnoxious, unpleasant and annoying but severe and pervasive enough to interfere with the ability to get an education or do our job effectively.



Dade&Broward

Director—Patrick Bens

OUR CHAPTER STARTED the year with Patrick Bens as new director.

The first quarter of the year we held our meetings in

October brought close encounters with Hurricane Irene. Too close for comfort, and the meeting was cancelled. However connections went on thru e-mails and we were contacted by Spanish Channel 51 to participate in a panel arguing about religion. A new member, Mr. Carlos Coronado took up the challenge and appeared on the set.

In November Carlos visited his native Peru and brought back a dozen atheist books in Spanish, including a translation of Russell's *Why I am not a Christian* but not in time for the event of the year: The Miami Book Fair International, which is a yearly morale booster for all who care to spread our message of freedom from religion.

December 1999 will see us all gathered at a neat new little restaurant "Mi Peru" for a "Meet and Eat," our last supper of the millenium. —Patrick

Tampa Bay

Director—Ed Golly

Ed Corl and Britt Girard continue to expose the atheist message at the Elm Street Flea Market on the campus of USF each Wednesday except when classes are out.

Meanwhile, the chapter met every month except November and December. We show a video at about half the meetings. Since the Library will no longer make equipment available, we are seeking a new meeting location in the Pinellas Park Library when renovation is complete.

This year we began holding dinner socials, usually the same week as the meetings. They draw a partially different group and allow for more communication among members or prospects.

Our continually running ad in *The Weekly Planet* keeps our phone ringing drawing several prospects a week on average. Circus McGerkis (see back page) also brought in a batch of new names.

We are now nearing 100 active members in the Tampa Bay Area. —Ed Golly



1999 Chapter reports

Broward, either in our traditional Library board room or at the Tudor room of the Caddyshack Pub in Hollywood at the suggestion of our secretary, Trisha Elkins.

In April, Dr. Rebeca Porto introduced us to her favorite hangout: "Chilango's," a Mexican restaurant where A of F held it's first ever South-Dade meeting and it drew a record attendance of 24 with several people joining on the spot! In June we met there again on Father's Day.

In May we were captured with the talents of Joanne

Gonzalez who was able to book Mr. Sam Fields, Esq. as speaker in July. Mr. Fields was litigant in a state/church case involving Kosher inspections in Broward county being paid for by county taxes.

Our August meeting was held in the mighty Scott Rakow Youth Center in Miami Beach.

In September, in Fort Lauderdale, we spent an entire meeting discussing

the tragic Madalyn O'Hair affair. The attendants filled every seat in the room.



Vince Valva, center, explains the world to a dazed onlooker at the Elm Street Flea Market on the USF campus in Tampa.

Wrong party for Vantura

It comes as no surprise that Minn. Gov. Jesse Ventura's comments about organized religion were met with vociferous opposition.

The political establishment, dominated by Repugnants and Demagogues, is radically opposed to any criticism of religion—which is nothing more than free

believe, because of his views on many social issues such as prostitution, drugs, homosexuality, and euthanasia, that he would be far more acceptable in the Libertarian Party. After all, he was excoriated by the National Chairman of the Reform Party for his ignominious *Playboy* interview comments.

—Barry Rowe
Gulfport

LETTERS



*“Some-
how...it's
almost
poetic how
a man is
being
chastised
by the
faith
industry
for being
honest. It
appears
that
religion
desires
pious
hypocrites
over
honest
human
beings.”*

speech, elucidated in the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment also states, unambiguously, that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...”

However, virtually every member of Congress supports forced religion on the American people. The phrase “In God We Trust” was absent from paper currency before Congress inserted it in 1956. The words, “under God” did not appear in the Pledge of Allegiance until Congress put it there in 1954.

The House and Senate chaplains, whose annual salaries cost taxpayers over \$80,000 each, open each session with Christian prayers. Most Republicans and many Democrats support: vouchers for religious schools, school (mandatory) prayer and bible reading, teaching creationism as science, and posting the Ten Commandments in schools, courts, libraries, etc.

We have a government that, on one hand, denounces free speech, which is guaranteed in the U S Constitution. On the other hand, this Draconian government violates daily this same document, by establishing religion.

Ventura's comments sparked an outcry from politicians, who say they were offended when he said, “Organized religion is a crutch for weak-minded people.” But, I am immensely offended by government's theocratic tendencies. I believe as the late great Carl Sagan, who said, “By no means should religion be immune from testing, from critical scrutiny, from skepticism...I hold that belief systems that cannot survive scrutiny are probably not worth having.”

With respect to Gov. Ventura's political future, I

What's Going On?

Tampa City Council, after a marathon eight-hour session held at the Convention Center, voted unanimously (by pre-determination) to place limitations on lap dancing in adult nightclubs. Ed sent this to the St. Pete Times early this month.

The statement by Monsignor Lawrence Higgins (confidant of Mayor Greco and numerous other Tampa power brokers) of St. Lawrence Catholic Church in Tampa that it's about time that people who drive past (the clubs) know what's going on and that “we've been bamboozled, put to sleep” (*St. Petersburg Times*, Dec. 2, 1999) was driven home to me by an article in the *Times* the very next day.

The article appearing on page 6A on Dec. 3, 1999 told of the exploits of defrocked Roman Catholic Priest John J. Geoghan in Suffolk Co. Mass. who has been named at least 75 times by people (young boys) claiming to have been sexually molested by him while he served at five parishes from 1962 to 1994. It is alleged that the Church was aware of the attacks but did nothing to stop them. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese has paid millions to settle (nearly two dozen) sex abuse claims.

Where have you been Monsignor? I have no problem figuring out what's going on inside the clubs but I'm secure in the knowledge that whatever it is, it's between consenting adults that were not left there by their trusting parents. What bothers me is what's going on behind the closed doors of the Roman Catholic Churches between adults and young, non consenting, frightened little boys. Funny how Father Geoghan's story appeared way back on page 6A while Joe Redner et al always seem to make the headlines.

—Ed McDougall
Spring Hill



A of F Legal Fund forming

Board Member John MacKay has resigned to become legal counsel for A of F.

Members may loan funds to the Legal Fund for pending litigation. If we are successful, we will attempt to recover our legal fees from the defendants. Then all loans will be repaid either in full or as a percentage of fees recovered. If our legal

action is unsuccessful, loans will be considered donations to the Legal Fund and not repaid. Just like any other donations to Atheists of Florida, such donations would be tax-exempt.

For more information regarding the Fund and pending litigation, contact Ed Golly at 813/839-7567 or write to the Tampa Bay Post Office Box. E-mail: AthALFLE@aol.com.