

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 14 Number 3 • March 2008

The March AFS Meeting

The March 9 AFS meeting will include a Potluck Lunch at 1:00 (see the next article) and a talk at 2:00 by Ed Buckner and Jack McKinney on their recently published book, *Opinions are Like Rear Ends...*

The meeting will be at the **Atlanta Freethought Center**, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA. (Feel free to arrive early for discussion and snacks.) To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 north past I-285 by 8 miles to Exit 7B, which is GA-140. Take GA-140 (Holcomb Bridge Road) west about 1 mile and turn left at Grimes Bridge Road. Go 0.2 miles to 1170 Grimes Bridge Road.

The March Potluck Lunch

The March 9 **Potluck Lunch** will start at 1:00. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name as follows:

- A-G: Bring a dessert;
- H-P: Bring a side dish;
- Q-Z: Bring a main dish.

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware

The March AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, March 14, at 7:00 PM.

The AFS Reading Group

The **AFS Reading Group** will meet on Thursday, March 27, at 7:30 PM at Borders Books & Music (4745 Ashford-Dunwoody Rd, Atlanta GA 770-396-0004). Discussion this month is on *The Trial of Socrates* by I. F. Stone. For details on the group, contact Forrest Greene or Brian Shriver at bookclub@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Purchases New Property

Well, we did it! The Atlanta Freethought Society has purchased a new property!

AFS President Steve Yothment and Treasurer Ed Buckner signed the papers at the closing on Feb. 11. Diane Buckner, Lew Southern and Jack McKinney were also present.

So, we are now the proud owners of a building with 0.54 acres of land that is *inside* the I-285 perimeter of Atlanta. The address of the property is:

Atlanta Freethought Society
4775 North Church Lane SE
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224

However, the building is not yet ready to be occupied. It is definitely a "fixer upper." So, we probably won't have an AFS meeting there for a few months. But we have several members who are very interested in renovating the building and landscaping the property. The AFS Board has assigned Lew Southern as the Project Director. He will coordinate the renovation efforts.

If you would like to help in the renovations, please contact Lew at lewsouthern@yahoo.com. We will announce planned work for volunteers on the AFS Forum email list. (We were pleased to have about 20 AFS members and friends at the cleanup of the property on Feb. 24.) Thanks to all of the volunteers working to improve the property!

AFS Meetings and Activities

- Mar 9: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00 AM.
- Mar 9: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
- Mar 14: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- Mar 27: AFS Reading Group at Borders Books, 7:30 PM.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 1:00 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

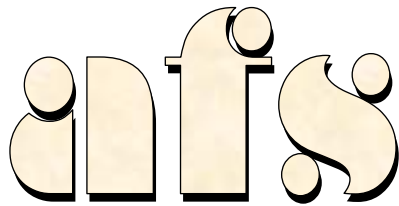
The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Center on Sunday, March 16, at 12:30 PM. Dr. Dennis Martin will speak on "A Dozen Lessons from the History of Ideas That Every Secular Humanist Should Know."

The **Secular Organizations for Sobriety** meets at the Atlanta Freethought Center every Tuesday evening at 8:00 PM. SOS is the secular substitute for Alcoholics Anonymous.

A new **Freethought Discussion Group** meets in Fayetteville, GA on *some* Wednesdays at 7:30 PM at Starbucks on Hwy 54. They will also have a lunch at noon, Saturday, March 8, at Thai Jasmine Restaurant on Hwy 54. Email Shelby, the group's leader, at freediscussion@hotmail.com for more information on the group.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, March 9, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

Yet another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, March 23, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta.



**Atlanta
Freethought
Society**

Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AFS Center, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Mar 9: Ed Buckner and Jack McKinney, on their new book, *Opinions are Like...*

Apr 13: Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church/State will speak.

May 11: Austin Dacey, author of *Secular Conscience*, will speak.

June 15: Tony King, on "Sumerian Influence on Religion and Western Culture."
This meeting will include a cookout picnic at our new property.

July 13: (tentative) Secular lobbyist Lori Lipman Brown will speak.

AFS Email Lists

The **AFS eNews** Announcement list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities and news. The **AFS Forum** is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation, and religion. Visit the AFS website at www.AtlantaFreethought.org for more info or to subscribe.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of free-thinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define *freethought* as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Steve Yothment

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The Atlanta Freethought News

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Membership in AFS is \$25/year for
individuals, \$35 for households, and
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Add \$15 to receive AFNews by mail.

Sustaining members (individual) \$100
and sustaining members (households)
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Visit our World Wide Web site at
www.atlantafreethought.org.

Send E-mail to

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AFS Webmaster: Walter Bell

Call and leave messages on the

AFS Info Line: 404-A THEIST

Money and Church Talk

By AFS Treasurer Ed Buckner

As most *AFNews* readers know by now, AFS now owns a piece of property inside the Interstate-285 perimeter highway, with a Smyrna address in Cobb County. (It's not inside any city's limits.) The property includes what used to be a church building. Our new freethought hall was constructed in 1866 by the members of the Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church, who built it to replace a church burned down by General William Sherman's troops in 1864. The site is a mile or two north of—and on a bluff above—the Chattahoochee River. It is near Atlanta Road, which follows a longstanding historic route into what is now Atlanta. Trolley cars, trains, competing groups of native Americans (Cherokees and Creeks, in pursuit of war or trade at different times), invading Federal troops, and generations of Georgians have all followed the route into and out of Atlanta. We have now planted our flag there in hopes of educating ourselves and others, especially Atlantans, about the disadvantages of religiosity.

The discovery of this site for us was anything but providential: many members had sought for years a building that would suit our needs better than the office condos we now own, closer in to Atlanta and more useful as a meeting place. (The Collins Springs building will seat about twice as many people as the condos, and more safely and comfortably.) Lew Southern, more than everyone else combined, has spent hundreds of hours investigating dozens of possibilities all across Atlanta: he discovered this site two years ago. (There were difficulties, now resolved, in getting the title cleared and insured.) It is imperfect but seems significantly better than any other place we considered—and the only place found that was even close to being both suitable and affordable. No one on the board opposed this purchase, though enthusiasm for it varied. Lew, Diane and I were the ones most susceptible to any possible charge of

blind faith in it (and if it all goes wrong somehow, we're the ones who should get the lion's share of the blame). Steve, Judy and Jack have been more judiciously skeptical but have all given crucial support to the effort. Tony, Freya, Walter and Bill have all been somewhat less actively involved in this, but all have contributed work or advice and none have stood in the way. (At least one AFS member was vigorously opposed to the purchase. Some of his objections may be resolved by the Frequently Asked Questions which follow this article.)

Many members, including among the board of course, have made key financial contributions. One family, who prefer not to be publicly identified, contributed \$10,000 explicitly for the renovation and repair of the building and property, expressing great confidence in the leadership of Lew Southern as project manager (a confidence reiterated by a unanimously adopted—except for Lew's own abstention—board resolution officially naming Southern as manager). AFS member Dr. John Henderson, retired surgeon from North Carolina, demonstrated amazing generosity and astonishing confidence in AFS by loaning us \$100,000, interest-free, to allow us to negotiate the purchase and to get the office condos sold without having to be financially or emotionally stressed in the interim. His only stipulation was that we pay him back first—reasonable beyond any doubt, of course—once the condos do sell. Others—Steve Yothment, the Buckners, Jack McKinney, Lew Southern, and Judy Thompson—loaned or offered to loan substantial amounts at low interest rates, without mortgage security or other burdens and for interest-only payments until we can regain financial stability. Other members have come through with generous donations or pledges of money.

As treasurer, I can tell you that an organization is quite strong and stable

when a \$240,000 purchase price can be raised very quickly and with minimal financial requirements or pressure. I can also tell you that we need more help.

We had, thanks to strong support from many members (there are many to thank, but Judy Thompson would win the top prize if we were awarding prizes) gotten ourselves onto solid ground over the last few years: we now own two office condos worth together around \$150,000 to \$175,000, and we had reduced our debt to under \$40,000 (all of that owed to members and at low interest rates). Our debt to members (we still owe no banks or other lenders anything) has now temporarily ballooned up to about \$275,000. Our first priority is to sell the condos and that should dramatically improve things. Payments from members who pledged donations related to this are still coming in. Once the condos are sold and pledges paid, we'll take stock and may even have to consider a mortgage on the new (if an 1866 building can be called new) property. But one way or another, we'll continue to need help from members.

One thing I believe the board is unanimous about: we do not want to get an "edifice complex," letting a building become (or interfere with) our purpose and we do not want to greet members and visitors at every turn begging for money. We have and want to keep many members who either cannot afford to pay more than dues or who just don't have enough interest in AFS to justify more than dues. Especially out-of-state members—though John and Ruth Henderson of North Carolina and Ernie and Sabina Hirshman of New Mexico are startling exceptions—quite reasonably see AFS as less central to their lives or interests. What follows is, therefore, written only for AFS members who can afford to support us more generously and who want to do so.

AFS board member Jack McKinney,

Money and Church Talk (continued)

himself a generous and reliable donor, had what turned out to be a brilliant idea as we struggled late last year to come up with a new approach for fund-raising. He suggested that we establish a "713 Club"—an "elite" core of members who gave or pledged as much as or more than the average annual amount of support (\$713 per year) that American churchgoers gave to their churches in a recent year. The rights and privileges appertaining thereto for this group would be.... Well, they'd be nonexistent, unless personal pride plus gratitude from one's fellow freethinkers count as rights and privileges. Most of us believed, I think, that Jack's idea would result in bringing one or two more members into the inner circle of four to six major financial supporters. We were wrong.

Jack's idea, obviously enhanced by leadership like Steve Yothment's and creative, dogged pursuit of a building

like Lew Southern's, has inspired many stalwarts and many others who are contributing more than before or who qualify as sustaining members. Some of these may well wind up being 713 Club members before 2008 is over (Charter Membership is still open, but hurry, hurry, this is a limited time offer... maybe).

Members who have pledged or given \$713 or more for 2008 include: Camille Brewer, Diane Buckner, Ed Buckner, Mirza Chowdhury, Freya Harris, Harriet Harris, Bruce Herr, Scott Horstemeyer, Jack McKinney (Jack didn't just inspire others: he talked himself into being a proud double-713 Club member—and I'm guessing he'll want double the rights and privileges, too), Ken Murray, Brenda Shepherd, Lew Southern, Lyn Stevenson, Judy Thompson, Steve Yothment, and one contributor who insisted on anonymity.

\$713 seems like—and is—a lot of

money. (Not as much as it was for your grandma, but it is definitely still real money.) But, without minimizing the generosity of our current 713-ers at all, let me point out that it is \$1.95 a day. (Even less, since this is a leap year—do the math for yourself.) A person could give up a five-pack-a-week smoking habit and give the money to AFS and live longer as well as be a proud 713-er. Forgo that Grande Latte at Fourbucks every weekday and you've raised all you need and more. Pass up the extra martinis at the trendy, happening in-crowd bar or the movie and popcorn at peak prices once or twice a week (we'll entertain you!) and you, too, can be proud major co-owners of an historic building.

Anyway, you get the picture—we honestly don't want you to give until it hurts. But do give until it helps if you can and if you want to. Thanks.

Frequently Asked Questions about the AFS Purchase

By AFS Treasurer Ed Buckner

Some of the questions below have not actually been frequently asked, at least not yet, but variations on all these either have been asked or are likely to be asked, by AFS members or by others, as we move our principal place of business. These are my answers, not official AFS approved answers, but I have discussed most of these with other AFS leaders. Some of this has already been discussed in articles in AFNews in May and June 2006. If you want more details or more questions answered, please let us know.

1. Why is a freethought group, of all people, buying a church, for god's sake?

We're not. We're buying a building that will suit our needs. It is well configured for holding meetings, hosting speakers, and otherwise pursuing our educational purposes, and it is located inside I-285, convenient to that interstate. We can, with only a reasonable stretch, afford the building. As any re-

ligious leader will tell you, a church is a group of people with a common religious purpose, not a building. It stopped being a church when the members sold it to a developer, long before we knew anything about it.

2. What will AFS do with the steeple, the cross, the religiously decorated stained-glass windows, etc?

Largely because this used to be a Primitive Baptist church, there are no religious icons, steeples, stained-glass religious windows, or other such religious artifacts in the building—and never have been. There were and are pews, but even those are plain.

3. What will AFS do with the pews?

That hasn't been decided. Keeping them—we'll probably call them seating benches if we do—would be convenient and reasonably comfortable and some of us (I am one) favor keeping them. Others want to sell them, either because they seem to hint at religiosity or because without them, we could more easily clear the floor for a

dance, etc. There is a market for used pews, though we wouldn't be likely to get too much for them because they are plain and un-cushioned. The AFS board will decide in due course.

4. What about the old cemetery across the street?

We have no responsibility—or rights—regarding the cemetery. The developer deeded it back to a cemetery association, and they will control and look after it. We may very well, just to be good neighbors, invite the board of that association to hold its annual meeting at our freethought hall—but we certainly aren't required to do so.

5. Does this mean—or won't it suggest—that AFS is admitting that we're religious or that freethought is in fact just another religion?

We're no more religious than we ever have been and no one in AFS leadership wants in any way to be or to pretend to be religious. If anyone in the community incorrectly concludes

(More) Frequently Asked Questions

that we are, we'll correct them.

6. Won't owning a building, instead of office condos as we have now, increase our maintenance costs and responsibilities?

Owning will increase both our control and our responsibilities, but, assuming we act in our own best interests, our costs should be reduced after the initial renovation expenses. We pay \$300 per month—\$3,600 per year—now to the condo association. That covers fire insurance as well as water and maintenance, but we expect to do most maintenance ourselves, with volunteer labor (skilled and unskilled) and that should keep our insurance, water, and maintenance costs lower than they are now. We will also gain much more control over our property, so we can build an additional building, enclose part or all of the picnic pavilion, landscape as we wish, hold yard sales or community events, etc.

7. Won't owning an historical building limit our choices as to what we can do with the building and property?

The building is not now an officially designated historical site and is unlikely to become one unless we decide to push for that. If it were so designated, that would reduce control over changes. Though there are no current legal restrictions on us related to the historicity of the place, some of us do want to preserve the look and feel of the old building because we like the simple, historical design.

8. Isn't an 1866 building likely to have lots of problems that need expensive attention?

The building seems basically sound, but of course a building that old, especially one that has stood empty for several years, does have some problems, and these will cost some money to fix. Some problems may develop that we are not yet aware of—but we expect to be ready. We have a contribution of \$10,000 explicitly for repair and renovation that should go a long way to covering these costs and, more important, we

have experienced and skillful people like Lew Southern, Doug Hattersley, Mark Banks and many others willing and able to work on the building.

9. Can AFS really afford this place?

Yes, with continuing support from our members, we can.

10. If we outgrow this place or otherwise decide to sell it, what guarantee is it that we'll make a profit or even get our money back out of it?

As with any other real estate, anywhere, there are no guarantees. Property in the immediate area has recently been appreciating and we've had informal opinions that the property—about ½ acre—would probably be worth more without the building than with it. (We do have insurance on the building.) The property is close to very upscale houses in Vinings and to several new developments and townhouses. We don't think we'll outgrow or otherwise want to leave this property anytime soon, and, of course, the further into the future one peers, the murkier the picture. So there are indeed risks—but that shouldn't surprise any adults among us.

11. Why is this property better than the condos we're in now?

It's clearly better in some ways, but there are disadvantages, too. It will be far less handy for Donna Gore to administer SOS meetings; it will be farther from home for some leaders like Tony King and for some members; it has less storage room than the Roswell condos and no office. It will, at least at first, cost us more (higher price plus initial repairs). But it will seat from 100 to 150, depending on how we configure it—roughly double what we have now. And the room arrangement and height will be much more conducive to programs and meetings. The location will be a plus for many current leaders and members and it will be psychologically easier to identify it as an Atlanta location: inside the perimeter, with a view of the Atlanta skyline from nearby vantage points, and near the Chattahoochee River, the main waterway for Atlanta. It is space over which we will

have much better control (see answer to question #6).

12. Aren't people in Cobb County or in the neighborhood going to take offense at AFS being in their midst and in a former church building?

Some people in Oakdale/Smyrna or elsewhere in Cobb may take unreasonable offense either at our presence in an old building that once was a church or at our presence at all. So far, however, people in the neighborhood, the preacher at the closest church, a number of people formerly associated with the church, a number of people at the Smyrna Historical and Genealogy Association, and several other environmentalists and historical preservationists have expressed strong approval of our presence and gratitude that we have helped keep the building from being destroyed. We have had actual firm offers of help in dealing with zoning bureaucracies, writing possible grant applications, and otherwise. And of course there are some religious people almost anywhere who take offense that we exist and dare to speak up. We think that is their problem, not ours.

13. What do Primitive Baptists believe, anyway?

Their religion is far too complex to be readily summarized in a short answer, but their ideas can be read about in any good library or on the Internet. They are famous for democratic foot-washing, an opposition to missionary proselytizing and to professional clergy, and for plain, unornamented buildings.

14. I'm glad AFS now owns this building—what can I do to help?

Money helps, of course. So does help with maintenance and renovation work. And we freethinkers always need and want help with educating ourselves and others, so write those letters to the editor, talk to your friends, attend programs, and read.

15. Is the property handy to public transportation?

There is a MARTA stop about two miles away. The distance is not the only factor, because the path is mostly

(More) Frequently Asked Questions

uphill along a busy street (Atlanta Road) without safe sidewalks, etc., so we'll need to supplement public transportation with someone driving to the bus stop to pick up people who arrive that way—but that can certainly be arranged.

16. What about parking?

There are probably 200 or 300 parking spaces on or along Collins Spring Drive, just behind the freethought hall. That street dead-ends into a light industrial/office park area that has little or no business on evenings or weekends when we'll be meeting. There are also some spaces on the

property, but we'll urge able-bodied people to park on the street behind, to help protect the beautiful trees—mostly oaks—on our property.

17. What is the new location address?

Atlanta Freethought Society
4775 North Church Lane SE
Smyrna GA 30080-7224

Atlanta Journal/Constitution article on our new place: http://www.ajc.com/living/content/living/stories/2008/02/15/atheists_0216.html

Pew Study Confirms Non-religious are a Significant Bloc

Survey shows Non-Religious Outnumber Those of Every Single Faith (But One) Americans' Faiths in Flux as More Reject Their Given Religions

The most detailed estimates to date of Americans' religious affiliations reports that a significant portion of U.S. citizens claim "none of the above," placing the unaffiliated second only to Roman Catholics in number. The March 3 release of the 35,000-respondent U.S. Religious Landscape Survey from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life shows that 16.1 percent of Americans have no particular religion at all, while 23.9 percent identify themselves as Catholic. The next largest "belief group" is Evangelical Baptist at 10.8 percent. All other denominational groupings show in the single digits or less.

The study also shows the number of Americans who identify as atheist or agnostic has risen from 3.2 percent to 4 percent, while a "remarkably high" 44 percent have rejected the religion placed on them in childhood.

"People are finding out that what they've been handed in youth doesn't work, or isn't important enough to defend when confronted with marriage or some other life situation that forces them to examine it," said Paul Kurtz, founder of the Council for Secular Humanism. "But when the shuffling is done, this study shows that three people are dropping religion altogether for each one gaining a faith."

The study also confirms the previous 2004 Pew Forum-University of Akron study findings that those who identify as strictly secular comprise more than 10 percent of the population, only on a much larger scale.

"The breakdown is interesting, in that it distinguishes between the vaguely religious and those who fall squarely in the secular camp," Kurtz said. "But I would venture to say that there is a significant number of Americans who sympathize with secularism, but who may still be nominal members of religious organizations. It's apparent that a significant percentage of the population identifies with secularism, and I trust politicians will bear this in mind."

[From a March 3 press release by the Council for Secular Humanism.]

Here are some specific findings from the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey:

If shifts among Protestant denominations are included, 44 percent of Americans have switched religious affiliations since childhood.

7.3 percent of the adult population said they were unaffiliated with a faith as children. That segment increases to 16.1 percent of the population in adulthood, the survey found. The unaffiliated are largely under 50 and male. "Nearly one-in-five men say they have no formal religious affiliation, compared with roughly 13 percent of women," the survey said.

The rise of the unaffiliated does not mean that Americans are becoming less religious, however. Contrary to assumptions that most of the unaffiliated are atheists or agnostics, most described their religion "as nothing in particular." Pew researchers said that later projects would delve more deep-

ly into the beliefs and practices of the unaffiliated and would try to determine if they remain so as they age.

While the unaffiliated have been growing, Protestantism has been declining, the survey found. In the 1970s, Protestants accounted for about two-thirds of the population. The survey found they now make up about 51 percent. Evangelical Christians make up a slim majority of Protestants, and those who leave one evangelical denomination usually move to another, rather than to mainline churches.

The percentage of Catholics in the American population has held steady for decades at about 25 percent. But that masks a precipitous decline in native-born Catholics. The proportion has been bolstered by the large influx of Catholic immigrants, mostly from Latin America, the survey found.

The Catholic Church has lost more adherents than any other group: about one-third of respondents raised Catholic said they no longer identified as such. Based on the data, the survey showed, "this means that roughly 10 percent of all Americans are former Catholics."

Immigration continues to influence American religion greatly, the survey found. Almost half of immigrants are Catholic. Muslims rival Mormons for having the largest families. And Hindus are the best-educated and among the richest religious groups, the survey found.

[From the U.S. Religious Landscape Survey at <http://www.pewresearch.org/>.]

California Pastor Renews 'Death Prayer' Campaign Against Americans United

IRS Target Wiley Drake Asks Follower To Engage in Imprecatory Prayers Against AU Staff Members

Controversial Southern Baptist Pastor Wiley Drake has again urged his followers to pray for the deaths of staff members at Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Last August, Americans United filed a complaint with the Internal Revenue Service about Drake's use of church letterhead and a church-based radio program to endorse presidential candidate Mike Huckabee. Federal tax law forbids tax-exempt groups from endorsing or opposing candidates for public office.

In a Feb. 5 letter, the IRS notified Drake that his First Southern Baptist Church of Buena Park is being investigated.

In response, Drake issued a Feb. 14 email appeal to followers to engage in "imprecatory prayers" (curses) against Americans United and three of its staff members.

Said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, "We deplore Pastor Drake's reckless and repugnant antics. Introducing this

kind of religious extremism into American life is reprehensible."

"We have asked the IRS to investigate what we believe to be Drake's violation of federal tax law," Lynn continued. "If Drake thinks he is innocent, he has more than adequate legal representation, and there is ample opportunity to make his case."

"Trying to turn God into some sort of heavenly hit man is repugnant," Lynn concluded. "There is more than a whiff of the Taliban in this action."

Wrote Drake, "In light of the recent attack from the enemies of God I ask the children of God to go into action with Imprecatory Prayer. Especially against Americans United for Separation of Church and State... Specifically target Joe Conn or Jeremy Learing [sic] and their leader Rev. Barry Lynn. They are those who lead the attack."

Drake directed his followers to Psalms 109 (as well as Psalms 55, 58, 68, 69 and 83) for examples of imprecatory prayers.

Verses from those texts ask God to bring death and destruction to those

targeted.

"Let his days be few; and let another take his office," says one passage. "Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg."

Another passage says, "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell."

Drake waged a similar campaign last year after Americans United filed its complaint against him with the IRS. Religious leaders from a wide variety of faiths repudiated the pastor's tactic.

Drake is a prominent pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination. He recently completed a term as second vice president of the group, its third highest post. He currently is running for president of the denomination, which became increasingly political after a fundamentalist takeover in the 1980s.

[From a Feb. 15 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State]

S'mores and Summer Fun at Camp Quest Smoky Mountains

From Amanda Metskas (Amanda@camp-quest.org)

Join us at Camp Quest Smoky Mountains June 1-8th, 2008. Camp Quest is the first summer camp aimed specifically at kids from atheist, agnostic, Bright, humanist, skeptic, and other freethinking families.

Camp Quest Smoky Mountains offers fun, friends, and freethought for campers ages 8-17 in the beautiful setting of Smoky Mountains National Park. Camp Quest Smokies is returning for its 6th year to the Great Smoky

Mountains Institute at Tremont (near Townsend, TN). Campers will spend the week hiking, exploring science and nature, swimming, cracking codes, making arts and crafts, performing skits, learning about famous freethinkers, roasting s'mores around the campfire, and much much more!

Adults, if that sounds like too much fun to miss, consider applying to be a volunteer counselor. For more information, camper registration, or volunteering, go to www.rationalists.org/cq.

Camper registration fees are \$550 for the first child from a family, and \$500 for an additional sibling from the same family. Partial camperships to reduce camp fees for families with financial need are available.

If Camp Quest sounds like fun to you but you just can't make it to the Smoky Mountains that week, check out www.camp-quest.org for information about the other Camp Quest sessions offered this summer.

Listen to AFS members John Snider and David Driscoll interview AFS president Steve Yothment on American Freethought Podcast #12 at <http://www.americanfreethought.com/>.

A Special “Thank You” For All the Help

On February 24, AFS members and friends responded to our plea for help for our first (of many) clean-up days at the new property. Lew Southern pre-arranged to have a large dumpster delivered to the property for us to put the junk in. The effort included clearing brush, trimming trees, raking and removing leaves, throwing away old fence material and ceiling tiles, repairing broken windows, and general clean-up. Here’s a list of the helpers. Thanks for all the work!

Lew Southern—the leader of the effort, as officially designated by the AFS board
 Steve Yothment—the AFS leader and an energetic worker, too. He worked on windows.
 Mark Banks—multitalented worker.
 Dan Barber—worked and brought us much needed and appreciated pizza at just the right moment, along with appreciated good wishes from the Fellowship of Reason
 Kathy Brooke—lots of cleanup work.
 Diane Buckner—work and brownies, cookies, and drinks
 Ed Buckner—using the term “work” pretty loosely in this case, with a heavy stress on “unskilled”
 Bill Burton—throwing away tile and many other things
 Haley Fant—clean-up work

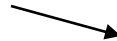
JoAnn Fant—brought deli chicken sandwiches and worked
 Donna Gore—throwing away tile and other stuff
 Doug Hattersley—clean-up work
 Bruce Herr—window pane replacement, and well done!
 Dwight Lyman—various duties
 Lyman’s beloved—didn’t get her name, alas—various work
 Jack McKinney—various, and picture taker
 Michael McKinney—lots of outdoor work
 Dennis Martin—various
 Karon Park—clean-up work
 Justin Parkes—various
 Dave Patterson—various
 Brian Shriver (and, for a visit the next day, Brian's toddler son) - various work



Bruce Herr replaced window panes.



Donna Gore threw old ceiling tiles into the dumpster.



The Picnic Pavilion... Is it time for lunch, yet?
 (And where are the chairs?)



AFS members and friends enjoyed pizza and other goodies for lunch.

(Photos by Jack McKinney.)



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If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$25 per year.

Household memberships: A household is defined as two members sharing one newsletter, and is available for \$35 per year. Since some of our households have additional members, there will be a \$5 per year charge for each additional voting household member.

Paper Newsletters: Due to printing and mailing expense, we add a surcharge of \$15 for members to receive a paper newsletter in the mail rather than our email version newsletter. We encourage all members to receive the newsletter by email to save on paper, postage and printing expenses.

International members: Because of international postage rates and special handling, we have been forced to add a surcharge of \$5 for members in Canada or Mexico, and \$10 for other foreign addresses for members who receive the paper newsletter.

Thank you for all your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

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“Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect.” —James Madison, 1774

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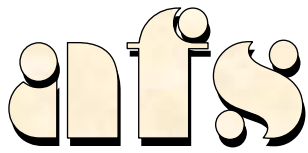
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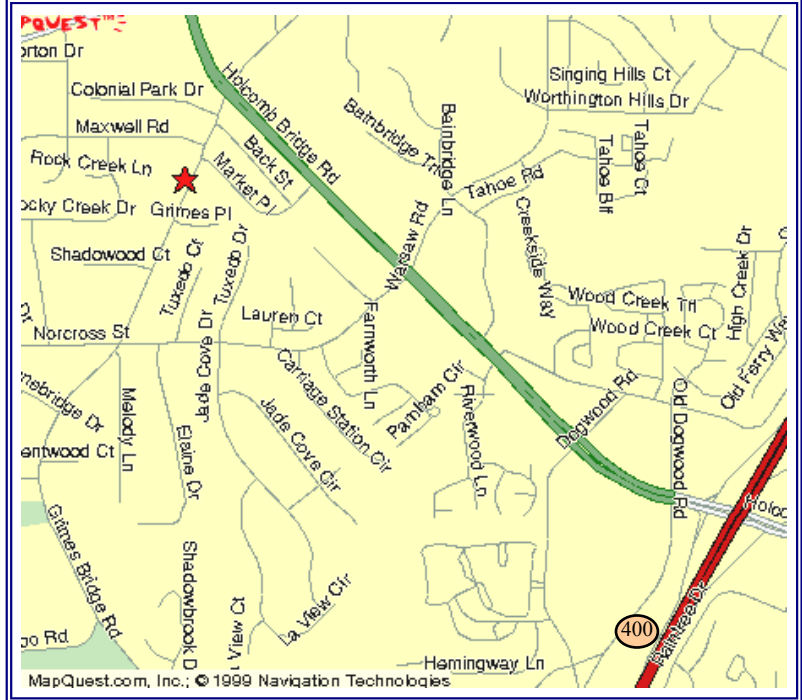
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**The March 9 Meeting:
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speakers:
Ed Buckner and
Jack McKinney**



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