

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication

• Volume 18 Number 7

• July 2012

## The July 8 AFS Meeting: “Freethought in a Free Country”

At the July 8 AFS meeting, AFS Board Member **Rick Pace** will moderate a panel discussion on freethought called “Freethought in a Free Country.” The direction the discussion takes will be affected by the knowledge and interests of the audience and the panel members—Rick, Steve Yothment, Paul Broman, Amy Vasinko and another leader or two. The program will be free-ranging and should appeal to freethinkers and people just curious about freethought.

Rick Pace, 31, was born here in the Bible Belt and was

raised Catholic; he prefers looking for answers over accepting superstition. Now an atheist/freethinker, Rick wants to do whatever he can to advance the secular movement. Rick has led our recent volunteer effort at MedShare. He also creates and sells popular freethought T-shirts.

The meeting will be at 1:00 at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA. Arrive as early at 12:00 for snacks and conversation with other freethinkers! Visitors are always welcome at AFS meetings.

## The July AFS Social

The **July AFS Social** will be on Saturday, July 14, at 1:00 at Stevi B’s Pizza Buffet, 4480 South Cobb Drive, Smyrna, GA. It’s at the intersection of South Cobb Drive and the East-West Connector. See you there!

## AFS Meetings and Activities

July 8: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

July 14: AFS Social, Stevi B’s Pizza, Smyrna, 1:00 PM.

## AFS MedShare Event a Big Success

On June 16, AFS members participated in our MedShare event. We sorted and packed medical supplies.

It was rather surprising to see how many medical supplies are donated to MedShare from local hospitals. We worked there for about 2 hours, but it was obvious that we only did a small amount of work compared to what still needs to be done. Not only did we sort the items, but we had to check expiration dates too. It’s not worth it to ship supplies with an expiration date within a year from now.

MedShare has quite a warehouse for storing the goods. We started with a guided tour and a talk on how MedShare works. Medshare is a non-profit company that redistributes surplus medical supplies and equipment to underserved healthcare facilities in developing countries.

We hope to help out at MedShare again very soon.

The below picture shows some members who worked at MedShare. (Some people left before the picture was taken.)

Thanks to all AFS members who participated in the event.



Photo by Rick Pace



## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

July 8: AFS Board Member **Rick Pace** will moderate a panel discussion on "Freethought in a Free Country."

Aug 12: **Rev. Susie the Floozie**, a Church of the SubGenius preacher, will speak. (See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_of\\_the\\_Sub-genius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Sub-genius).)

Sept 9: Dr. Andy Thomson will speak. He is author of *Why We Believe in God(s): A Concise Guide to the Science of Faith*.

Oct 14: TBD

## AFS Email Lists

The **AFS Announcements** email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to [AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo.com) to subscribe. The **AFS Forum** email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to [AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com). For information on other AFS email groups, visit the AFS website at <http://www.atlantafreethought.org>.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, 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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## Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 18, Number 7, July 2012

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Sustaining Membership is \$100.

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### Visit our website at

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See AFS events and member views at:

[facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought](https://www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought).

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# FFRF Rebuts Catholic Bishops' "Religious Freedom" Propaganda

**They don't want freedom of religion: They want freedom to impose their religion on you.**

**T**he Freedom From Religion Foundation is fighting back against an offensive by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and its "Fortnight for Freedom" from June 21 through July 4. Like a secular David defending himself against Goliath, FFRF has launched an opening volley against the monolithic church and its war against the contraceptive mandate.

FFRF, a state/church watchdog and the nation's largest association of atheists and agnostics, calls the bishops' crusade a direct assault against civil rights guaranteed by our secular Constitution.

"The Catholic Church's campaign should sound an alarm. The Bishops do not seek freedom of religion, but the freedom to impose their religion on you," warns FFRF in its white paper<sup>1</sup>, "A Statement Exposing the Catholic Church's Attempt to Redefine Religious Liberty," responding to the bishops' statement on religious liberty. Far from being the victims of government persecution, it is the bishops who seek to deny religious liberty, FFRF charges in its 12-page rebuttal.

"The bishops are wrapping themselves in the American flag, even using patriotic, Independence Day rhetoric, to camouflage their assault against true religious liberty," maintains Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. "It's so important to correct the record of their phony claims, and for freethinkers and civil libertarians to take up the cudgels against the bishops' threat to reproductive liberty and freedom of conscience."

What has the bishops on the war-path? In August, Health and Human Services will expand preventative care

to provide FDA-approved contraceptives without charging women employees a co-pay. The bishops claim their "religious liberty" is jeopardized by this rule, even though they and all churches and denominations are explicitly exempted from providing this benefit to their own employees.

In order to honor the concerns of religious and quasi-religious non-church institutions such as schools or hospitals, the Obama Administration compromised and let them off the hook by ordering private insurance companies to pay for and provide the contraceptive benefit to these employees.

The bishops' assault against the contraceptive mandate began on June 21 on the "the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More." FFRF notes the irony of beginning with a celebration of two men who tortured and burned to death people for exercising freedom of conscience. "The Catholic campaign to redefine liberty has the same goal – to bring all Americans in line with Catholic dogma, if not by force, then by force of law."

FFRF documents the Roman Catholic Church's history of zero-tolerance for dissent. FFRF dismantles the Bishops' claim that the civil rights movement was their doing and points out that, "Unlike [Martin Luther] King [Jr.], the Bishops are seeking to disobey a just law. ... they are latter-day Governor Wallaces – bigots seeking a legal sanction to discriminate and use the force of civil law to inflict their religious doctrines on non-Catholics. The church does not seek civil rights, it seeks to deny civil rights."

FFRF offers a point-by-point refutation of the Bishops' list of so-called

"concrete examples," calling it a litany of exaggerated affronts. For example: The Bishops claim religious discrimination because they are no longer able to receive federal funds to provide healthcare services to victims of sex trafficking. FFRF found that the Bishops were awarded \$15.9 million over the past six years, \$5.3 million of which the Bishops used to pay "administrative costs," but refused to provide "abortion services or contraceptive materials" to the victims who "were repeatedly raped and at constant risk of unwanted pregnancies and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS." As a court ruled: "To insist that the government respect the separation of church and state is not to discriminate against religion; indeed, it promotes a respect for religion by refusing to single out any creed for official favor at the expense of all others."

To the Bishops' question, "Can we do the good works our faith calls us to do, without having to compromise that very same faith?," FFRF responds: "Your faith is not compromised by your good works; your good works are compromised by your faith."

FFRF members are urged to write letters to the editor exposing the "Fortnight for Freedom," to respond to coverage, and help defend against what the Catholic Church is doing in their area to fight the contraceptive mandate. To find out local assaults against the contraceptive mandate at the diocesan level, you can check the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' online<sup>2</sup> listing diocese by diocese of its offensive.

[From a June 20 FFRF press release.]

<sup>1</sup>See the FFRF's white paper *Our First Freedom: A Statement Exposing the Catholic Church's Attempt to Redefine Religion* at <http://ffrf.org/publications/OurFirstFreedom/>.

<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/fortnight-for-freedom/fortnight-freedom-diocesan-activities.cfm>.

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FFRF's Newest Billboard in St. Louis, Missouri: Put Women's Rights Over Bishops Wrongs:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/06/19/ffrf-newest-billboard-put-womens-rights-over-bishops-wrongs/>

Atheist Billboard in Texas Targets Catholics With Phrase 'Put Women's Rights Over Bishops' Wrongs':

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/29/atheist-billboard-in-texas-catholics-womens-rights\\_n\\_1638099.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/29/atheist-billboard-in-texas-catholics-womens-rights_n_1638099.html)

Billboard Takes On Catholic Bishops in Texas: <http://www.examiner.com/article/atheist-billboard-takes-on-catholic-bishops-texas>

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# Church Pastors Become Atheists

## Houston-Area Pastor Is One of First to Make Decision Public

**M**ore than 200 church leaders across the country now say they no longer believe in God, including a Houston-area pastor who was one of the first to publicly announce his decision.

Mike Aus, who was pastor at Theophilus Church in Katy, Texas made that announcement during an appearance on a Sunday morning show on MSNBC.

"Hardly anyone reads the Bible," said Aus on the "Up with Chris Hayes" program<sup>1</sup>. "If they did, the whole thing would be in trouble."

Theophilus Church members told reporters they were blind-sided by the announcement. They said they had no idea Aus had completely changed his beliefs until they saw him on the program.

"Are you going to preach next Sunday?" host Chris Hayes asked Aus.

"I'm going to go back next week and meet with my leadership and talk about where we go from here," said Aus. "We'll see."

Aus was a long-time Lutheran pastor at churches in the Houston area, but now he said he no longer believes in the message he had been preaching for almost 20 years. Aus declined reporters' requests for an interview. He said his statements on MSNBC explained his loss of faith.

"As I started to jettison the beliefs, I came to realize fairly recently there wasn't a whole lot left," Aus said.

The effect was immediate on his church of about 80 members. Weeks after his announcement, the church dissolved. Members said their pastor's complete change in faith was devastating.

"When a pastor comes forward and says, 'I don't believe anymore,' it rocks their world," said Dr. Keith Jenkins, a Methodist pastor and former president of the Houston Graduate School of Theology. "Members see pastors as spiritual super heroes."

Jenkins said many church leaders question and then lose their faith, but never before has it been a so public.

"It's almost gone viral," said Jenkins.

The website [www.clergyproject.com](http://www.clergyproject.com) has become a confidential gathering group for pastors, ministers and other church leaders who no longer believe in God. The group said it has more than 240 members. Some like Aus have gone public. Most other church leaders in that group have kept their new lack of belief hidden from others, including their congregations. They are secret atheists still serving churches and ministering to members even though they don't believe in what they preach anymore.

"I'm sure there are many pastors actively serving in churches who are going through a faith crisis and have lost their faith, but they haven't left because it's their livelihood," said Jenkins. "But they need to move on. They don't need to stay with a church and use their position as a pastor with sacred trust to try and take others with them."

[From a June 6 article<sup>2</sup> at [click2houston.com](http://click2houston.com).]

<sup>1</sup>See former-pastor Aus on "Up with Chris Hayes" at <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/up-with-chris-hayes/46848396#46848396>.

<sup>2</sup>See the article at <http://www.click2houston.com/news/Church-pastors-become-atheists/>.

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## Recent Articles:

Why We Don't Believe in Science:

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/frontal-cortex/2012/06/brain-experiments-why-we-dont-believe-science.html>

The Bible, Biology and Bigotry: Ms. Magazine Blog: <http://msmagazine.com/blog/blog/2012/06/08/the-bible-biology-and-bigotry/>

The Lies You'll Probably Be Hearing About MRFF and the Military Bibles:

<http://blogs.alternet.org/speakeasy/2012/06/15/the-lies-youll-probably-be-hearing-about-mrff-and-the-military-bibles/>

The Truth About Religion in America: [http://www.alternet.org/story/155890/the\\_truth\\_about\\_religion\\_in\\_america](http://www.alternet.org/story/155890/the_truth_about_religion_in_america)

3 Reasons Young Americans Are Giving Up on God:

<http://theweek.com/article/index/229276/3-reasons-young-americans-are-giving-up-on-god>

Hell, Not Heaven, Helps Keep Society Safe:

[http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-205\\_162-57461798/hell-not-heaven-helps-keep-society-safe/](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-205_162-57461798/hell-not-heaven-helps-keep-society-safe/)

Atheists, Muslims See Most Bias as Presidential Candidates:

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/155285/Atheists-Muslims-Bias-Presidential-Candidates.aspx>

Mormons quit church in mass resignation ceremony (July 1):

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/01/us-usa-utah-mormons-idUSBRE86000N20120701>

An Excellent Talk: Advice to Young Scientists - by E. O. Wilson (June 27):

<http://www.farnamstreetblog.com/2012/06/advice-to-young-scientists-e-o-wilson/>

Atheism is Winning Across the World:

[http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/982569/atheism\\_is\\_winning\\_across\\_the\\_world/](http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/982569/atheism_is_winning_across_the_world/)

Why We Don't Believe in Science:

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/frontal-cortex/2012/06/brain-experiments-why-we-dont-believe-science.html>

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# Federal Judge Blocks New Mississippi Abortion Law

**Governor says the new law is designed to “protect the health and safety of women.”**

A federal judge on Sunday (July 1) temporarily blocked enforcement of a Mississippi law that could close the only abortion clinic in the state.

U.S. District Judge Daniel P. Jordan in Jackson issued a temporary restraining order the day the new law took effect.

He set a July 11 hearing to determine whether to block the law for a longer time.

“Though the debate over abortion continues, there exists legal precedent the court must follow,” Jordan wrote.

The law requires anyone performing abortions at the state’s only clinic to be an OB-GYN with privileges to admit patients to a local hospital. Such privileges can be difficult to obtain, and the clinic contends the mandate is designed to put it out of business. A clinic spokeswoman, Betty Thompson, has said the two physicians who do abortions there are OB-GYNs who travel from other states.

The clinic, Jackson Women’s Health Organization, filed a lawsuit seeking to block the law. The suit says the admitting privileges requirement is not medically necessary and is designed to put the clinic out of business.

If Jackson Women’s Health Organization closes, Mississippi would be the only state without an abortion clinic.

At the bill-signing ceremony back in April, Mississippi Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves was clear about the intent. “We have an opportunity today with the signing of this bill to end abortion in Mississippi,” he said.

When Republican Gov. Phil Bryant

signed the bill, he said he wanted Mississippi to be “abortion-free.”

“Gov. Bryant believes HB 1390 is an important step in strengthening abortion regulations and protecting the health and safety of women,” Bryant spokesman Mick Bullock said in a statement Sunday night. “The federal judge’s decision is disappointing, and Gov. Bryant plans to work with state leaders to ensure this legislation properly takes effect as soon as possible.”

In the order, Jordan wrote: “Plaintiffs have offered evidence—including quotes from significant legislative and executive officers—that the Act’s purpose is to eliminate abortions in Mississippi. They likewise submitted evidence that no safety or health concerns motivated its passage. This evidence has not yet been rebutted.”

Jordan also wrote that Jackson Women’s Health Organization is “the only regular provider of abortions in Mississippi, and as of the Act’s effective date, JWHO cannot comply with its requirements.”

The Center for Reproductive Rights, based in New York, helped file the lawsuit for the Mississippi clinic. The center’s president and CEO, Nancy Northup, said in a statement Sunday: “Today’s decision reaffirms the fundamental constitutional rights of women in Mississippi and ensures the Jackson Women’s Health Organization can continue providing the critical reproductive health care that they have offered to women for the last 17 years.”

“The opponents of reproductive

rights in the Mississippi legislature have made no secret of their intent to make legal abortion virtually disappear in the state of Mississippi,” Northup said. “Their hostility toward women, reproductive health care providers, and the rights of both would unquestionably put the lives and health of countless women at risk of grave harm.”

Republican Rep. Sam Mims of McComb, who sponsored the new law, said it is designed to protect the health of every woman who has an abortion.

“We know for a fact that this is a serious procedure,” Mims said in an interview Sunday. “Women can have complications.”

Mississippi physicians who perform fewer than 10 abortions a month can avoid having their offices regulated as an abortion clinic, and thus avoid restrictions in the new law. The Health Department said it doesn’t have a record of how many physicians perform fewer than 10 abortions a month. Clinic operators say almost all the abortions in the state are done in their building.

The clinic says if it closes, most women would have to go out of state to terminate a pregnancy—something that could create financial problems for people in one of the poorest states in the nation. From Jackson, it’s about a 200-mile drive to clinics in New Orleans; Mobile, Ala.; or Memphis, Tenn. [From a July 1 article by Debbie Elliott at <http://www.NPR.org> and a June 30 article at <http://www.CentroTampa.com>.]

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## A Letter from Jack McKinney

In September 2009 I suffered back-to-back strokes resulting in my being hospitalized for three months followed by three months at a rehab facility. During this period my “real life” effectively went to sleep in its normal dimension and a “pseudo life” took over in a ‘parallel dimension.’ It’s all rather difficult to try to explain. If I can find strength to do so I intend to write a book about it. The title will be “Dying in One Dimension, Living in Another.”

Anyway, a box of cards and gifts from my many AFS friends (and strangers) was brought home and promptly lost among odds & ends. I recently excavated it and wanted to express my appreciation and to say a belated thank you for thinking of me at that time.

—Jack McKinney

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# FFRF Sends Letters to Superintendent and Mayor in Georgia

**Prayers and Religious Songs at Graduations, and a Religious Ad from the Mayor, Prompt Letters.**

**T**he Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a second letter to Houston County Superintendent Robin Hines on June 5, complaining about Constitutional violations at Houston Country graduation ceremonies.

(Houston County is just South of Macon, GA.)

In the letter, FFRF attorney Andrew Seidel noted that two prayers and two "overtly sectarian musical performances" occurred at the Perry High School graduation ceremony.

Seidel noted five complaints from four people about graduation ceremonies of two schools that indicate "a systematic problem that requires immediate action."

School spokeswoman Beth McLaughlin said the board is aware of the complaints. She said, "It's our district's intent to comply with prevailing law in these matters."

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The FFRF also filed a complaint with the city of Warner Robins over a newspaper ad the mayor published.

Andrew Seidel, the FFRF attorney, sent a letter on June 8 to Mayor Chuck Shaheen taking issue with the ad. Under the mayor's office letterhead, and signed by Shaheen, the ad published in the May 20 edition of The Telegraph expresses pride in the city and all of those who worked to find a missing boy.

At the end it reads "A humble heart knows that if it were not for the grace of 'God' we would have no pride for

ourselves or our nation. Humbleness brings us to our knees with loving spirits, thankful hearts and prayers of praise."

It then includes a King James Version Bible quote, Ecclesiastes 3:1, "To Every Thing There Is A Season, And A Time to Every Purpose Under Heaven."

The letter states that the ad is unconstitutional because it is "an overt promotion of Christianity" by a government, and suggests "to non-adherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members." It also takes exception to the suggestion that non-believers do not have pride in their nation.

Seidel said the letter was prompted by a local citizen who saw the ad but he declined to name the citizen because of the potential of harassment.

The letter concludes by asking that "no further religious messages from you, as Mayor, and the City government are disseminated under color of official title and authority."

The letter also stated that the group had sent a complaint to the city in March over a prayer vigil but has gotten no response.

Seidel said he has also sent the city an open records request in relation to the newspaper ad, seeking any documents related to the content, approval and purchase of the ad.

Asked what action the group might take if the city does not agree to requests in the complaint, Seidel said "A lawsuit is always a possibility."

Mayor Shaheen told reporters on June 9 that he didn't see anything wrong with the ad. "You can separate Church and State, but you can't separate Church and Chuck," he said. "It's who I am."

Shaheen said he didn't know whether the city will respond to the complaint. He said he turned the letter over to the City Attorney Jim Elliot to make that determination.

Many people came to Warner Robins City Hall on June 19 to show their support for both Hines and Shaheen. Shaheen said at the meeting, "I'm blessed to be the mayor of Warner Robins, but I cannot not share my faith and be who I am because I'm worried about some groups who don't like the name of God."

In a June 28 interview with Bill Bumpas of OneNewsNow.com, Shaheen said he agrees with the separation of church and state, just not the way religious skeptics see it.

"The state needs to get out of the church, but the church doesn't need to get out of the state," he contended. "You need to have more godly people in government and keep government out of the church."

[This article is from multiple news sources including articles in the Telegraph (<http://www.macon.com/>) and from WMAZ-TV (<http://www.13wmaz.com/>)]

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New Study Shows Generation X Has Grown Less Religious Over Time:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/06/07/new-study-shows-generation-x-has-grown-less-religious-over-time/>

In U.S., 46% Hold Creationist View of Human Origins:

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/155003/Hold-Creationist-View-Human-Origins.aspx>

Creflo Dollar, Megachurch Pastor, Arrested for Battery Charges:

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/creflo-dollar-megachurch-pastor-arrested-for-battery-charges-76321/>

Louisiana Reps Object to Vouchers for Islamic School, No Problem With Christian Schools: <http://tinyurl.com/7nxmvrg>

New FFRF Ad Urging People to Quit the Catholic Church Features Actress Julia Sweeney:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/06/08/new-ffrf-ad-urging-people-to-quit-the-catholic-church-features-actress-julia-sweeney/>

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If you are going to DragonCon in Atlanta on September 1, please consider marching in the parade in the "Cheerleaders for Science" group. Margaret Downey of Freethought Society is organizing this group and has a banner for the parade.

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# American Atheists Says Atheism is Patriotic

**“Religion is unpatriotic at its core, because it places its law above the law of the land,” Says AA President**

**A**merican Atheists announced on July 3 that they will be flying a banner over New York City on Independence Day (July 4). The banner behind the airplane will read, “Atheism Is Patriotic – [atheists.org](http://atheists.org).”

Dave Silverman, President, said, “Religion is unpatriotic at its core, because it places its law above the law of the land. Indeed, religion abhors civil law, which is why we see attacks against science and privacy coming from our religious politicians. Religion asserts itself on the population at large by infiltrating the political system with true believers who will then use the political system to do the church’s bidding.”

Teresa MacBain, American Atheists new Public Relations Director, stated, “As a pastor I often reminded my congregants that ‘God’s law was higher than man’s law.’ What that really meant was that the people should take orders from the church, above our civil government. Atheism, being the absence of any religious beliefs, implies that human law alone is supreme over humanity. Here in America, the high-

est law is in Washington DC, not some fictional heaven. That’s patriotic.”

Silverman concluded, “I ask all citizens to remember that the separation of church and state benefits everyone, except preachers and the politicians in their pockets. Religious equality only comes from government neutrality. Celebrate your Independence.”

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American Atheists welcomed Teresa MacBain on July 2 as the newest addition to their staff. Teresa is the new Director of Public Relations and is responsible for overseeing media relations, internal communications and website responsibilities.

Teresa joins the American Atheists’ team with over 20 years of experience in public relations, most recently as Executive Director of The Clergy Project. Prior to that, she served in the religious non-profit sector as an educator and pastor. Her goal is to expand the department, establish effective policy and develop the communications arm of American Atheists.

AA President David Silverman said,

“It is an honor to have Teresa on our team. Since coming out as an atheist at the 2012 American Atheists Convention in Washington, DC, Mrs. MacBain has proven herself to be an effective communicator and a champion of the rational, religion-free life. As the Marines of the Freethought movement, it is fitting to have a Cabinet-level director who has only recently been freed of the bonds of religion.”

Silverman continued, “She is a shining example of the fact that atheists who feel trapped in the preacherhood can escape the lying life and get honest employment: there is no life after death, but there is life after church!”

Blair Scott, Director of Outreach, said, “I am looking forward to working with Teresa in her new role. Teresa is an inspiration to many atheists who are still sitting in the pews and leading congregations. Her experience as a pastor will give her amazing insight in her new role in the atheist movement.”

[From July 2 and July 3 news releases by American Atheists. See their website at <http://www.atheists.org/>.]

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## Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, July 15, at 12:30 PM at Atlanta Freethought Hall. Dr. Linda Johnston, Professor of Conflict Management at KSU, will speak on “Ethics.” For details, see <http://www.georgiahumanists.org/>.

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet on Sunday, July 15, at 2:00 at the Tenth Amendment Media Group’s Conference Room, 2245 Godby Road, Ste. 111, in College Park, GA. See <http://blacknonbelievers.org/> for details.

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. They also have meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. See <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The **SOS** (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30PM in Roswell. For more information, send an email to [donnaigore@yahoo.com](mailto:donnaigore@yahoo.com).

**GUST** (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet on Monday, July 9, at 7:00PM at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville, GA. <http://gust.domek.org/>

The **Fayette Freethought Society** hosts a lunch at El Rancho Restaurant in Peachtree City, GA, on every first and

third Saturday at noon. They also meet on other days for Book Club, philosophy and science discussions and civic activities. <http://www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society/>

The **Peachtree City Humanists** meet often for discussions at Starbucks, lunch, dinner at She’s Bistro, and more. See <http://www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/>.

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will have a Skeptics Road Trip to Dayton, TN for the Scopes Monkey Trial Festival on Saturday, July 21. For more: <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., July 28, at 7:00PM at Manuel’s Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Dr. Christopher Jenkins of The Orienne Society will talk on “Using Science to Save an Imperiled Snake.” See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, July 8, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, July 22, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

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# Atheist Clubs Spring Up in High Schools Across the Country with Help From the Secular Student Alliance

With help from the Secular Student Alliance—a national organization of more than 300 college-based clubs for freethinking students—high school atheist clubs are springing up across the country<sup>1</sup>, the *Religion News Service* reports.

J.T. Eberhard, director of SSA's high school program, says he hopes that both atheist and religious students having clubs will help foster a dialogue.

"I also hope it will let the atheist students know that you can be an atheist and its okay," Eberhard told *Religion News Service*. "You are still a good person. We want to say: Here is a place where you can feel that."

There were about a dozen clubs of this kind at the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year – a number that increased to 39 in 17 states by the start of summer break. The clubs are student-led, and SSA only provides information and guidance upon a student's request.

Some clubs exist in states that have large numbers of people who claim no religious affiliation, such as New York, Washington and California. Others are located in more religion-centered states, with North Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas all claiming at least one club for atheists. Since January of this year, students representing 73 different high schools have requested "starter kits," according to SSA.

Some students have no issue launching an atheist club assuming they meet their school's criteria, which usually entails obtaining a faculty sponsor and demonstrating student interest.

Others are met with administrative resistance<sup>2</sup> like at Melbourne High School in Melbourne, Fla., where administrators rejected an atheist club on the basis that it was "too controversial." Students at another Florida high school were told that no religious clubs were permitted, even though there was a school Christian club in existence. The principal of Houston's La Porte High School denied students the use of the word "atheist" due to the fact "it could disrupt the educational process."

In such instances, Eberhard usually intervenes, reminding administrators that the Equal Access Act<sup>3</sup> grants students the right to form a club.

Earlier this month, Chelsea Stanton, a senior and atheist at Collingswood High School in New Jersey, also used the law to her advantage in defending her refusal to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

"That's the beauty of America – that you don't have to follow the same religion the majority does," she said.

In Rhode Island, Cranston High School West student Jessica Ahlquist



J.T. Eberhard spoke at the Lake Hypatia July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration this past week.  
(Photo by Ed Buckner.)

objected to a prayer banner the school had on display. The 16-year-old brought the case to court, receiving a January mandate for the school prayer banner to be brought down because it violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Ahlquist has also received a \$40,000 scholarship fund<sup>4</sup> from the American Humanist Association.

Ahlquist was also honored with the Humanist Pioneer Award at this year's annual American Humanist Association in New Orleans, the *Christian Post* reported<sup>5</sup>.

[From a June 29 article in the Huffington Post.]

<sup>1</sup>See [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/not-just-chess-atheists-are-organizing-high-school-clubs-too/2012/06/29/gJQAaBPmBW\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-faith/not-just-chess-atheists-are-organizing-high-school-clubs-too/2012/06/29/gJQAaBPmBW_story.html)

<sup>2</sup>See <http://www.democraticunderground.com/12307852>.

<sup>3</sup>See [http://www.religioustolerance.org/equ\\_acce.htm/](http://www.religioustolerance.org/equ_acce.htm/).

<sup>4</sup>See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/18/jessica-ahlquist-atheist-\\_n\\_1286875.html?ir=education&ir=education](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/18/jessica-ahlquist-atheist-_n_1286875.html?ir=education&ir=education).

<sup>5</sup>See <http://www.christianpost.com/news/teen-atheist-who-brought-down-prayer-banner-wins-humanist-award-75737/>.

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## Also in the news:

Hamilton County (TN) Commission Sued for Praying Before Meetings (June 15):

<http://www.nooga.com/155818/hamilton-county-commission-sued-for-praying-before-meetings/>

FFRF Files Suit against Hamilton County (TN) Commission Over Prayeres (June 16):

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2012/jun/16/prayer-issue-goes-to-court/>

Following Hamilton County Lawsuit, Citizens Continue Criticizing County Commission Prayers:

<http://www.nooga.com/155886/following-lawsuit-citizens-continue-criticizing-county-commission-prayers/>

Hamilton County Commissioners Hear from Residents Opposed to Prayer:

<http://www.wrcbtv.com/story/18719431/hamilton-county-commissioners-hear-from-residents-opposed-to-prayer>



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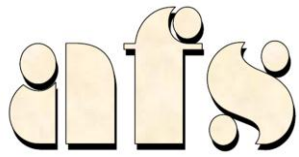
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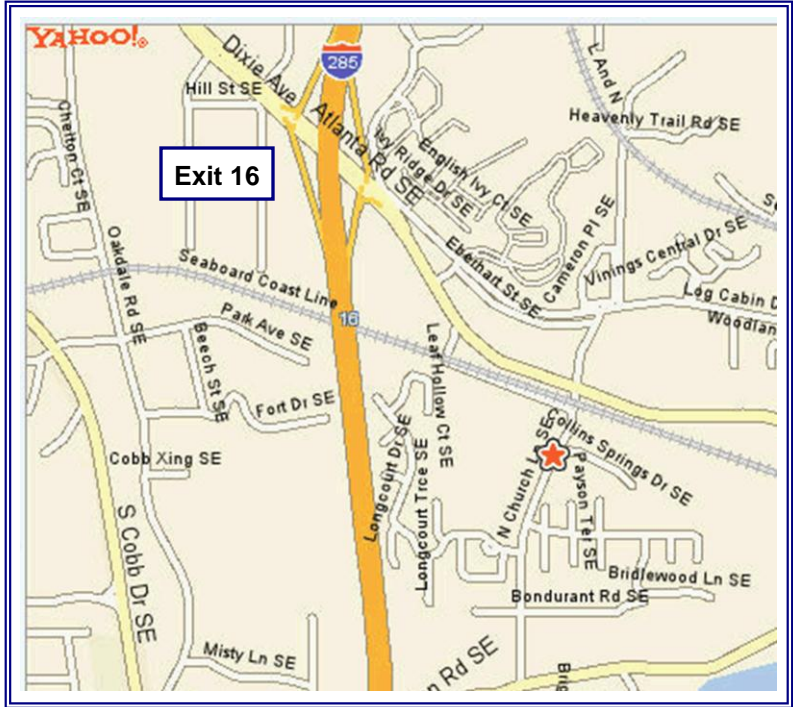
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1:00 at AF Hall,  
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**This Month's Speakers:  
A Panel with Rick Pace**



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