

The September AFS Meeting Dr. Jill Dermyer, Certified Secular Therapist

Our speaker for the September 13th AFS meeting is **Dr. Jill Dermyer**.

For many people, religion and faith-based communities offer a space of comfort, guidance, support and solace during our best and worst times. Unfortunately, some people find instead abusive experiences and relationships that can lead to psychological distress.



Dr. Jill Dermyer

Devout Christians are excommunicated from their church community after coming out

as gay or transgender. People choose to leave their faith due to changes in personal beliefs and/or values systems, and are then disowned by their immediate family. Members of a congregation are emotionally and sexually abused by a church member in a position of power.

These harsh realities are all too often swept under the rug.

Dr. Dermyer offers a secular environment in which people can safely explore how their religion-based trauma or loss has affected them.

They may feel depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, social isolation and/or shame. This is the case whether they have been rejected by their faith-based community, have chosen to leave willingly, or are still a devout community member but are struggling with what they see as harmful effects of their religious doctrine.

Individual and/or supportive group therapy are crucial to reconciling evolving religious beliefs with one's view of oneself, others and the world one lives in.

Dr. Dermyer is proudly registered with the Secular Therapist Project. This online referral network connects prospective clients with secular therapists in their area, and ensures the use of evidence-based and secular therapy practices.

Calendar

9/13 AFS Board Meeting 11:00 a.m.

9/13 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.

10/11 AFS meeting postponed for Atlanta Pride at Piedmont Park

10/18 Potluck lunch starts at noon

10/18 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.

All events are at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change.

Be sure to like AFS's Facebook page for updates: www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought

Reason Rally 2016



At his talk at Dragon Con's Skeptic Track on Friday night, American Atheists President David Silverman said that he had a special announcement he would give after his speech. He then

revealed the exciting news that the second ever Reason Rally is coming up on June 4 2016 in Washington D.C. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. In this historic place, we will proclaim our dream of a future where people are free to express rational and reasonable views without the fear of reprisal, retaliation, or retribution!

We should all make plans to carpool to Reason Rally. I bet we can get hotel rooms cheaply if we share. It would be good to put Atlanta Freethought Society out there as a group.

Mark your calendars. You can find out more about the event at www.reasonrally.org.



Please join our brand new Meetup group!
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society



Programs and Speakers

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

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.

Sep 13: Dr. Jill Dermyer, Clinical Psychologist and Certified Secular Therapist in Georgia
(Also AFS Board Nominations)

Oct 11: Atlanta Pride; no meeting - Go to Atlanta Pride instead!

Oct 18: Jeffery Tayler and Inna Shevchenko. Jeffery is a contributing editor of The Atlantic and writes for Salon.com. Inna is a Ukrainian born political activist, and the president of FEMEN International.

Nov 8: Bob Truett, former zoologist, "What is This Thing Called Love?"

Dec 13: Sarah Green, Tennessee Regional Director for American Atheists

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to 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. The AFS Facebook page is at [facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought](https://www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought). For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is 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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Atlanta Freethought News

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A Life Well Lived by Kate Edgar and Dan Barker

www.oliversacks.com

ffrf.org/news/blog

Oliver Sacks died early August 30 at his home in Greenwich Village, surrounded by his close friends and family. He was 82. He spent his final days doing what he loved—playing the piano, writing to friends, swimming, enjoying smoked salmon, and completing several articles. His final thoughts were of gratitude for a life well lived and the privilege of working with his patients at various hospitals and residences including the Little Sisters of the Poor in the Bronx and in Queens, New York.

Dr. Sacks was writing to the last. On August 14, he published an essay, "[Sabbath.](#)" in the *New York Times*. Two more articles are to be published soon, one in the *New York Review of Books* and one in the *New Yorker*.

Sacks also left several nearly completed books and a vast archive of correspondence, manuscripts, and journals. Before his death Sacks established the [Oliver Sacks Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization devoted to increasing understanding of the human brain and mind through the power of narrative nonfiction and case histories.

The foundation's goals include making Dr. Sacks's published and yet-unpublished writings available to the broadest possible audience, preserving and digitizing materials related to his life and work and making them available for scholarly use, working to reduce the stigma of mental and neurological illness, and supporting a humane approach to neurology and psychiatry.

We at the Sacks office extend our love and sympathies to Dr. Sacks's partner, Billy Hayes, and we are enormously grateful for the outpouring of love and support from Dr. Sacks's readers and friends around the world.

Although raised Jewish, Oliver Sacks lived and died as a non-believer. When he accepted the Freedom From Religion Foundation's "Emperor Has No Clothes" award in 2005, he described himself as "an old Jewish atheist." He was an English neurologist and writer who was famed for such studies as *Migraine*, *Awakenings*, *A Leg to Stand On*, and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat: And Other Clinical Tales*. Sacks was a FFRF Honorary Director.



*Oliver Sacks at work, February 2015
Photo by Bill Hayes*

Two weeks before his death, Oliver wrote another piece for *The Times* on Aug. 14, in which he movingly recalled his Orthodox Jewish upbringing, his rejection of that faith as a teenager, his mother's cruel rejection of him for being gay, and poignantly commented:

"And now, weak, short of breath, my once-firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts, increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life — achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest."

FFRF protests prisoners crafting pope chair

ffrf.org/news



A national state/church watchdog with 23,000 nonreligious members has sent a letter of protest to the Commissioner of Prisons over misuse of prisoners to carve and upholster a special chair to be used by Pope Francis when he celebrates Mass in a prison later this month.

Freedom From Religion Foundation President **Annie Laurie Gaylor** wrote Commissioner of Prisons Louis Giorla today. She pointed out this is at least the second time Pennsylvania prisoners have crafted gifts for Catholic leaders. In January, inmates made a special chair for Philadelphia Archbishop **Charles Caput** when he celebrated Mass at the prison.

The Philadelphia Prison System appeared to coordinate the gift for the pope, with inmates from Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center hand-carving the chair out of walnut and sending it to Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility for reupholstery.

These prisons are public-supported, FFRF noted, they are not Catholic prisons.

"This is literally a captive audience, being asked to labor to produce something for a sectarian purpose, a purely devotional event, and that is totally inappropriate," she added. It doesn't matter whether the prisons asked for volunteers — prison officials shouldn't have been involved at all, she added.

"We write to point out that PPS appears to be showing impermissible favoritism to one religion over all others, and religion over nonreligion, by inviting Catholic religious leaders to its facilities and then bestowing gifts on them," Gaylor said.

The group asked that PPS take steps to ensure that it does not continue to use inmates to further religion and impermissibly promote one religion above all others.

Outcast!

By A.R. Durham, currently residing in Savannah, GA

Traditionalists espousing “family values” like to say that the family unit is the most essential component to the structure of our society. Christians often mask their intentions toward proselytizing through charity work. But we discover that with some of these same Christians, aside from spreading the gospel through good deeds, their motivation wanes when confronted with the poverty of “the other.”

Recently, someone close to me did something which could have forced me to make a sudden move from my housing. I can’t live with my parents, so I began inquiring at homeless shelters in several cities but did not get replies. Then I started calling aunts and cousins who live outside Georgia, seeking someone to take me in. I was hoping my health would hold while I looked for work and lodging.

My extended family are spread throughout several southeastern states. I used to attend the family reunions and exchange Christmas cards with them when I was younger. I was a black sheep but they tolerated me because I professed to be a Christian. Before I made the transition to atheism, I felt patronized by the religious e-mails from my relatives which were basically proselytizing messages.

When I was around four years old, I had been attending church since I was in the nursery and went to the associated kindergarten. I accepted Jesus at that age. The Jesus I was taught to believe in was a good Samaritan—he helped heal the sick and helped the poor, and was an exemplar of non-judgmental empathy and compassion. This was the Jesus that I loved, with all my heart. And yes, when I was four I loved Santa Claus, too, because he was also a kindhearted good Samaritan.

As a small child I was empathetic and sensitive—demonstrated in how I cared about other children—especially those who were sad or hurting. In third grade, I befriended a girl in my class who

was being bullied for being overweight. I volunteered for all sorts of charity work since childhood and throughout my life. My last job duties included providing services to the homeless.

It did not matter that I set out to make a life out of helping others and doing good deeds, and being an example to others. It was because I did not believe in their version of Jesus and associated dogma—that I was not “born again” within the precepts of their peculiar definition, that my aunts and cousins urged me to “find a church family” and be “born again.” Their e-mails also contained images and literature which were anti-Semitic, enforcing gender roles in women and promoting jingoistic patriotism and war. I could not help but to find them offensive. I had distanced myself from them but never completely forsook them. Nor did I openly admit to being atheist (among other things). As for those closest to me, neither one of my parents accept that I am atheist.

While on the phone, my cousin told me that if I were to stay at a homeless



shelter, it would “be impossible to get a job.” I asked him, and an aunt, and several others if they knew of any family or cousins I could stay with—even if it were only overnight while I sought work and shelter. As he was denying me a place to stay with his family, he asked me if I had found myself a “church family” since I relocated. It would have made no difference whether he had caught

word that I was no longer religious. Not ascribing to their version of Christianity is bad enough, to them.

It has been years since I have seen most of my extended family because most of us lack economic mobility and/or personal transportation. Since I chose my own path in life and we are distanced by many miles, why should I expect them to take me in? They know I still love them as kin, and I never did anything treacherous to them, or insulted their beliefs. “To each one’s own!” is what I say.

I read somewhere that to Muslims, it is against the tenets of their religion to refuse shelter or food to a stranger—especially a pilgrim en route to Mecca. To me, the Muslims I met were always warm, helpful, and kindhearted people—be they acquaintances, cab drivers or shopkeepers. They never stole from me, never gossiped about others, or tried to convert me to their religion. I’m not endorsing any religion, merely stating Christians have a near monopoly on the intolerance that I have experienced. These are the same Christians who believe those practicing their same “faith” hold the monopoly on virtuosity and good deeds.

I realize now, that had I managed to travel and show up on their doorstep, my relatives might have let me in from the summer heat, but briefly. They would not have allowed an overnight stay—and probably would have refused to help pay for a return bus ticket.

Fortunately, there came a last-minute remedy to my housing issue (at least temporarily). While I would rather live in another city, I must remain here while my health is in decline.

I went to a clinic last night, where the doctor and staff expressed a very alarmed reaction at my blood pressure reading (it was not responding to the prescribed meds), and related effects. I left the place feeling a nebulous uncertainty—not knowing if my situation could be grave. I hope someone is mistaken! I will be getting a second opinion.

Incidentally, while at this clinic, I explained to the rural-looking doctor, who ought to be named “Billy Bob,” about the stress I have been experiencing,

the close brush with homelessness and relatives’ rejection. What did he say to that? “You are an outcast!”

I hope these small town doctors are wrong, and that years from now I will be alive and living where I want to be. Maybe “Doctor Billy Bob” is right about my being an outcast. I have been called everything from a renaissance woman, to a reformer, to a revolutionary—and other names I won’t mention here! I stand by my principles, despite the fact I have been ridiculed, blacklisted, and rejected by family for my philosophy and shunned by former friends when I lost my financial prestige and fell on hard times.

“Family values” is a euphemism for repression. Especially when one doesn’t have a family worth a damn.

I know there must be others out there in this world who share my perspectives, despite my isolated location. Although my time left is uncertain, those ideas will live on in others who share them.

I dedicate this essay to all Atlanta-area freethinkers. To those who have come to Atlanta and found a niche in the city I so love; those who were born in Atlanta and celebrate its diversity and accept the misfits amongst them as they are—and most of all, those who are still struggling to find a sense of belonging in a callous and hostile world. If there is one thing I have learned—even when you lose faith in all else around you—do not lose “faith” in yourself!

More Atheist Books to Georgia Parks on 9/11 Anniversary

Governor Deal and Attorney General Olens Continue Support for Atheist Education

Atlanta Freethought Society (AFS) President **Laura Ross** announced today that the organization “continues to be unhappy that DNR is not accepting AFS books—but we’re pleased that **Governor Deal** has ordered the softcover Gideons New Testaments removed from the parks, and pleased that American Atheists is helping with our efforts.” Ross added, “our own longtime member and stalwart supporter, **Perry Mitchell**, will be delivering copies of an important atheist book, *Fear Faith Fact Fantasy*, by the late **Dr. John Henderson** of North Carolina, to Black Rock Mountain State Park near Clayton, GA, between 3 and 4 P.M. on Friday, 11 September.” These books are being donated on September 11th partly to remind Georgians of the horrors of a faith-based attack on the US fourteen years ago.



American Atheists president David Silverman said, “We continue to be delighted with the support of Governor Nathan Deal for our efforts to help educate Georgia citizens and visitors. Thanks to him, state park visitors can now read an atheist book in the comfort and natural beauty found at

Black Rock Mountain. We’ve made sure to label every book we’re donating as coming from us, of course. But each label also properly credits Governor Deal and **Attorney General Sam Olens.**” Most of the books were donated by American Atheists, but some were also provided by AFS, and the logistics of getting them to Black Rock Mountain is being provided by AFS.

Perry Mitchell, who will be delivering the atheist books, is an activist of many years standing (notably as the local spokesperson for the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s first Atlanta outdoor billboard campaign; he was interviewed by the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* and several TV news shows). Mitchell said, “the Bibles are unconstitutional because of the apparent state endorsement of Protestant Christianity, and I’m proud to be following up earlier efforts by the Atlanta Freethought Society.”

Governor Deal insisted the Bibles be returned to the state-owned cottages and lodge rooms, and invited atheist books into the parks. Labels in all the books being donated credit the



Governor and Attorney General, but many freethinkers remain displeased with diverting the state parks from their primary purposes.

Controversy over this may continue, as American Atheists and AFS will donate more books to other Georgia parks in the future as a part of the governor’s program.

Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

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

We Agnostics Atlanta meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Galano Club, 585 Dutch Valley Rd NE, Atlanta, GA 30324. Clubhouse phone number: (404) 881-9188. This is an Alcoholics Anonymous group.

The Peachtree City Humanists meet often for discussions at Starbucks, lunch, dinner at She's Bistro, and more. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/)

Fellowship of Reason meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. There are meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. (www.fellowshipofreason.com)

The Georgia chapter of **Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF)** meets on the first Sunday of each month at AF Hall from 2:00-4:00 and you can learn more about their topics at www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia.

Atlanta Astronomy Club will meet at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Dr, Atlanta for their Sept 12th meeting at 3-5 pm. For more information, check out the website (www.atlantaastronomy.org)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, Sep. 13, at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) has their monthly meeting on Monday, Sep 14, 6:00 p.m. at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville. The topic is "Culture Shock." Here in the South it can be difficult adjusting to the strong Christian culture. Let's share our stories about life in the South. They are interested in hearing perspectives from those who grew up religious, those who didn't, and views from all over. (www.meetup.com/brights-295/)

Atlanta Skeptics - There will be an open discussion on Sep 19 at Manuel's Tavern, 602 North Highland Ave NE, Atlanta. The meeting will be in the North Avenue room (walk in the front door, take a right and head all the way back).

Dinner and social hour starts at 6pm with the presentation kicking off at 7pm. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics)

Sunday Assembly Atlanta will meet at First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta, 470 Candler Park, Atlanta, GA 6:00 p.m. Sun, Sep. 20. At presstime, the topic had not yet been announced. Please ask a volunteer helper if you need assistance in any way. The venue is wheelchair accessible and there is always a potluck supper afterwards.

Besides the Sunday meeting, this month, SA also has a range of other events, such as *Mindfulness Meditation*,

Transhumanist Discussion, What Technology Wants, First Sunday Small Group & Potluck, Artist's Meetup, hikes and camping, book clubs, and Help Often projects. Please check out the meetup page for more information, and get involved! For more about the global movement, check out: sundayassembly.com/about/ (www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/)

Another **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** is scheduled for Sun., Sep 27 at 4:00 p.m. at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

The Atlanta Science Tavern is having a meeting at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, Atlanta, GA from 7-10 p.m. Sat. Sep 26. The topic is "Why do speakers of different languages gesture differently?" given by Seyda Özçaliskan, Associate Professor of Psychology, Georgia State University.

Speakers of all languages gesture when they talk, but there are differences in the gestures these speakers produce. Where do these differences come from?

One obvious possibility is that children learn these differences from watching others gesture. But maybe they don't. Perhaps learning Italian is enough to make a child gesture like an Italian speaker, just as learning Turkish would make a child gesture like a Turkish speaker.

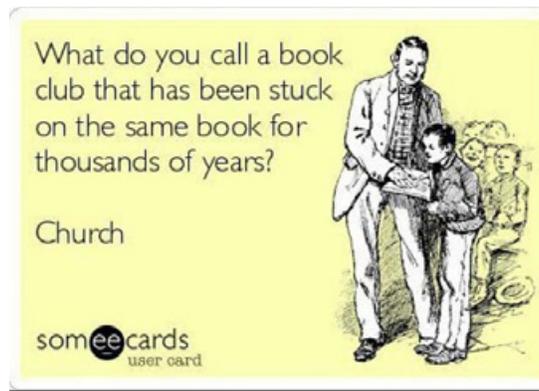
We explore this question by studying the gestures of congenitally blind speakers speaking different languages.

The cost is \$3.00 per non-student. Note that Science Tavern also has quite a few other listed events. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

Black Nonbelievers will have a special Fifth Tuesday event at WRFG Community Radio, 1083 Austin Ave Ne, Atlanta, on Tues, Sep 29 from 6-7 pm. Listen on 89.3 FM, at wrfg.org, or come to the station for the hour long edition of the Lambda Radio Report on WRFG, where the topic is anything and everything atheism related. BN President **Mandisa Thomas** will be guest hosting with **Charone Pagett**, and you are welcome to come to the studio and chat! The show airs from 6-7 pm (EST), and we hang out afterward. If you can't make it in person, you can listen on 89.3 FM, and online at www.wrfg.org via the Listen Now tool. (www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers/)

Atlanta Atheists has first Sunday meetups each month: the place varies. Check Meetup for info on the August get-together. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter meets on the second Saturday of each month at 1 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA, but according to their Meetup page, the next meeting is Nov. 14. There is no proselytizing of any kind allowed at these meetings. For more information and resources, please visit www.recoveringfromreligion.org. (www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter/)



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(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

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!

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Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime.

Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

Thank you for 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

We still have these great books for sale:

Why I Am Not A Christian—\$8

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by Keith Parsons. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. A wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

An Uppity Old Atheist

Woman's Dictionary—\$8

By the late, great Carol Faulkenberry (illustrated by Amanda Faulken-berry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

Quotations That Support the

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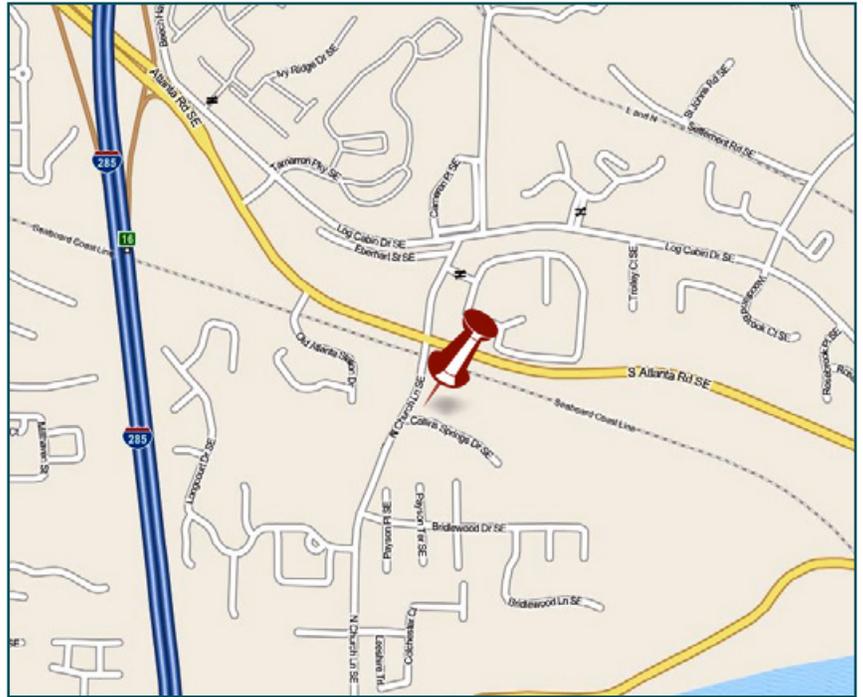
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**The September 13th
Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Dr. Jill Dermyer**



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