

The November AFS Meeting An Interview with Connie Venuso



Connie Venuso

Our guest for the November meeting, **Connie Venuso**, is an extraordinary human being, a humanist and a nurse who has traveled all over the world as a volunteer to help her fellow human beings in some of the worst places on Earth—the ones where a nurse’s help is most desperately needed. She has quoted **George Bernard Shaw** as writing, “I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. Life is no ‘brief candle’ to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to the future generations.” And those are words she obviously lives by.

She has also served as a nurse offering medical help to people, especially children (some of them in grave condition), right here in Georgia, managed services at a bookstore in Decatur, helped people stop smoking, and worked with public school teachers. She’s been to more far-flung corners of the globe than many globe-trotting thrill seekers—but she went to Mongolia, Haiti, Ecuador, Nepal, several places in Africa, India, Tibet, Vietnam, and other places to help, not to



Ed Buckner

gawk. Anyone who is interested in hearing from someone who exemplifies altruism should not miss this meeting.

Venuso will show us some photos from her travels to war-torn and refugee-dominated parts of Earth and she will be interviewed about all this by **Ed Buckner**. There will be chances for AFS audience members to ask questions, too.

Calendar

11/12	Potluck Lunch	12:00 p.m.
11/12	AFS General Meeting	1:00 p.m.
12/10	AFS Board Meeting	11:00 a.m.
12/10	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:
www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought



The November Potluck

Before the November 12th meeting we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at noon. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name:

- A-G: Bring a main dish**
- H-P: Bring a desert**
- Q-Z: Bring a side dish**

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our 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, 30339 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.

Nov 12: Connie Venuso

Dec 10: Warren Alan Tidwell

Jan 14: Daniel Horowitz Garcia

Feb 11: Kevin Mink

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.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@yahoogroups.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org. To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

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

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

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.



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Atlanta Freethought News

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Atheists Threaten Lawsuit Over Johnson Amendment Exemption in GOP Tax Bill

atheists.org

Following the release of the House Republicans' tax cut package on November 2nd, American Atheists threatened a lawsuit if the bill were to become law.

Included in the bill is a provision that would exempt churches and other religious entities from the Johnson Amendment, the 1954 requirement that nonprofit organizations—including churches—refrain from partisan political activity, which includes endorsing candidates or spending money on election campaigns.

The language of the bill would allow religious groups, but not secular nonprofits like American Atheists, to endorse or oppose candidates, as long as that activity was part of the "ordinary course" of the group's activities.

"They just can't help themselves," said **Geoffrey T. Blackwell**, staff attorney for American Atheists. "They're not simply repealing the Johnson Amendment. They're specifically exempting churches—and only churches—from the requirement, giving them even more special treatment on the basis of religious belief. The Equal Protection violation here couldn't be more clear."

Contrary to the claims of those who support the repeal of the Johnson Amendment, churches and other religious organizations are already free to discuss issues that are of concern to them, including hot-button political issues.

"We will not sit idly by while Congress creates a massive loophole that would turn churches into unaccountable, tax-deductible Super PACs for billionaires to hijack our nation's electoral system," said **David Silverman**, president of American Atheists. "With no transparency, no disclosure, and even a tax break for donating, every church in America would become a political weapon."

"If this bill is signed with the Johnson Amendment exemption in place, we'll have no choice but to sue," added Silverman.

According to estimates from Giving USA, Americans donated more than \$119 billion to churches and religious groups in 2015. If just 5% of that money had been redirected to political purposes, it would have eclipsed the total amount of money spent on 2016 federal elections, \$6.5 billion.



SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
Look what happens without it.

Atheists Condemn Trump Administration's 'License to Discriminate'

atheists.org



In reaction to the **Department of Justice's newly released guidelines** about "protecting" religious liberty, American Atheists president **David Silverman** released the following statement:

"**Jeff Sessions** has shown, time and again, that he has no respect for real religious freedom and instead views religion as an excuse to ignore the law. Whether it's individuals serving in the government, owners of public accommodations, and even giant, publicly traded corporations, this administration is giving them all a license to discriminate.

"Today's guidelines are just another way the Trump administration is paying off the President's debt to his backers on the far extremes of the religious right. They've already lost the fight on marriage equality and are losing on anti-discrimination laws, so now they're changing their approach and just demanding exemptions and special treatment.

"These bigots are no different than the racists of 50 years ago. They're making the same arguments and the same demands. They want to ignore the laws that protect minority rights because they don't care about equality—they only care about their own supremacy."



Trump Religious Adviser Robert Jeffress Has Questions. We've Got Answers.

By Rob Boston in *Wall of Separation*

www.au.org

There are many bad things about Donald Trump's presidency, but one of the worst is that it has thrust people like Pastor Robert Jeffress into the national spotlight.

Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, was one of any number of far-right theocrats with a smidgen of regional notoriety at best until he hitched himself to Trump's campaign. Now, as one of Trump's inner circle of religious advisers, Jeffress is much loved by the Fox News Channel and appears there regularly.

The fame seems to be going to Jeffress' head. During a recent speech, he boasted about his media appearances and mocked those who oppose him.

"You know," he remarked, "every time I am debating one of these pinhead lawyers from the ACLU or the Freedom From Religion Foundation on Fox News, I always ask them about this. I said, 'Can you explain to me why, in the 1860s, it was constitutional to teach the Bible, or to pray, or to put Nativity scenes in the public school, but in 1980 – 120 years later – you can't even post the copies of the Ten Commandments? Can you explain to me what changed? Did the Constitution change and nobody told us about it? And do the judges



today have greater insight into what our Founders meant than those who lived closest to the Founders?" (Thanks to Hemant Mehta of the "Friendly Atheist" blog for [first reporting](#) this.)

The idea that Jeffress thinks he can best expert civil liberties lawyers is amusing on its own. The situation becomes downright hysterical once one realizes that Jeffress is abysmally ignorant of the history of religion in public schools.

With that thought in mind, I'd like to answer his questions:

"Can you explain to me why, in the 1860s, it was constitutional to teach the Bible, or to pray, or to put Nativity scenes in the public school, but in 1980 – 120 years later – you can't even post the copies of the Ten Commandments?"

Actually, several courts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries said it wasn't permissible to do those things.

Let's step back a bit. The fact is, there were not a lot of public schools in America in 1860. That concept didn't start catching on until after the Civil War. As states began to build public schools and pass mandatory attendance laws, religion immediately became a flashpoint for controversy.

Parents were soon in state courts, fighting the compulsory worship that was being imposed on their children. Ohio's Supreme Court ruled in 1869 that public schools were not required to sponsor daily Bible readings. Wisconsin's supreme court struck down mandatory school prayer in 1890. Nebraska's high court followed suit in 1903, and the Illinois Supreme Court did the same in 1910.

The issue flared up in other states as well. The claim that mandatory prayer, Bible reading and other religious exercises were common in public schools and widely accepted until the U.S. Supreme Court's school prayer rulings of 1962 and '63 is a Religious Right myth. Such practices were always controversial and were often invalidated at the state level.

"Did the Constitution change and nobody told us about it?"

Yes, the Constitution did change – as anyone who has read legal history knows. In July of 1868, the 14th Amendment was ratified. It was designed, in part, to make it clear that states could not violate citizens' fundamental rights.

The history of this is a bit complicated, but the passage of that amendment began a process legal scholars call "incorporation" whereby many of the protections found in the Bill of Rights – originally rights that only the federal government was bound to respect – were imposed on state governments as well. This opened up new opportunities for people to bring civil liberties cases, including ones dealing with church-state separation, in the federal courts. I'm surprised Jeffress hasn't heard about this; it was in all of the papers.

"And do the judges today have greater insight into what our Founders meant than those who lived closest to the Founders?"

This is a classic false dichotomy. Judges today don't have to guess what the Founders might have thought about these issues. They can read the Founders' actual words. More importantly, we have a historical record of their deeds, including the Constitution they wrote. From these words and actions, judges can ascertain that these men strongly opposed force and compulsion in matters of religion. From here it's a short step to the realization that no American – especially a young child in a taxpayer-supported institution – should be compelled to take part in a religious exercise against his or her will.

I recently [published a paper](#) about the history of religion in public schools. It's a fascinating topic, and I'd urge Jeffress to read my article. He might learn a few things. That's good because when he's arguing with a "pinhead lawyer," I'm sure Jeffress doesn't want to come off as someone who has absolutely no idea what he's talking about.

Nonbelief Relief Announces Timely Much-Needed Grants

ffrf.org

A leading freethought charity is disbursing fresh grants to fight natural and man-made catastrophes currently afflicting our world.

Nonbelief Relief, a charitable organization created by the executive board of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, has announced an additional donation for hurricane-besieged Puerto Rico and new funding to aid the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Nonbelief Relief has also extended a \$5,000 stipend to a Bangladeshi atheist who is stranded in Nepal with his wife and child after fleeing for his life from his native country in 2015.

Generous donations from nonreligious Americans to Nonbelief Relief in October have made possible the new \$10,000 grant to Americares, earmarked for Puerto Rican relief. Additionally, Nonbelief Relief has redirected \$2,500, rejected by Boca Helping Hands to aid its work after Hurricane Irma hit Florida, to Atheists of Puerto Rico, for direct aid to Hurricane Maria victims.

Nonbelief Relief this week also gave \$10,000 to Doctors Without Borders, to help its ongoing efforts with the Rohingya refugees, who are suffering on a “scale that we couldn’t imagine,” according to **Kate White**, the medical emergency manager for Doctors Without Borders in Bangladesh.

“What is happening to the Rohingya is a result of religious persecution,” says **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, who as FFRF’s co-president acts as administrator of Nonbelief Relief. “There should not be official or de facto national religions. In an ideal world, all governments would be secular, and religion would be an entirely private matter of conscience.”

The grants are in addition to approximately \$100,000 in donations given out by Nonbelief Relief earlier this fall to secular charities, many of them providing relief to North American flooding, hurricane or earthquake victims, as well as \$10,000 to the nonprofit ConPRmetidos specifically for Puerto Rico.

Nonbelief Relief is aiding a persecuted atheist teacher whose story will appear in the December issue of FFRF’s newspaper, *Freethought Today*. He was relocated to Nepal by Forum-Asia and has been helped by several groups, including Amnesty International, but those grants have run out. He is not considered a legal immigrant in Nepal and is trying to relocate to another country with the help of some human rights organizations.

Nonbelief Relief Inc. is a humanitarian agency for atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and their supporters to improve this world, our only world. It

seeks to remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice on a global scale, whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma. Such relief is not limited to but includes assistance for individuals targeted for nonbelief, secular activism or blasphemy.

Your donation will make a difference by furthering Nonbelief Relief’s work, in the name of atheists, agnostics and other freethinkers.

Nonbelief Relief has no overhead costs and all donations go for charitable purposes. Nonbelief Relief is a separate entity from FFRF, but donations can be given via FFRF, making your donation deductible for income-tax purposes. **Choose the “Nonbelief Relief” designation in FFRF’s “donate” dropdown.**



Secular Coalition for America Signs On To Amicus Brief Opposing Religiously-Based Discrimination

www.secular.org

On October 31st, the Secular Coalition for America released a statement announcing it has signed onto an **amicus brief** filed by the **Center for Inquiry** in the case of *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. The case centers around **Jack Phillips**, an owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop, who violated a local anti-discrimination law by refusing to design a wedding cake for a same-sex couple. The Secular Coalition for America was joined by its member organization American Atheists as a signatory to the amicus brief.

Statement by Larry T. Decker, Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America:

“This is not just about wedding cakes and this is not just about discrimination against the LGBTQ community. This is about whether the religious beliefs of others can constitute an exception to our civil rights. What’s at stake in this case is nothing less than the foundation of our secular government and the principle that all Americans are equally accountable under the law. Currently, Phillips has the same rights and responsibilities as all other for-profit businesses in Colorado. A ruling in Phillips’ favor would bestow religious business owners with a right to discriminate that has no basis in the Constitution. The impact of such a decision would reach far beyond the Masterpiece Cakeshop, opening the door to as many varieties of discrimination as there are religious beliefs. That is why we are proud to sign on to the Center for Inquiry’s brief petitioning the Supreme Court to draw a clear line in the sand and not extend religious privilege into this dangerous new territory.”

Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

The Atlanta Science Tavern has several meetings planned. Please check meetup page for more information. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

The SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Roswell. For more information, send an email to donnajgore@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 similar to Alcoholics Anonymous group.

Marietta Skeptic/Humanist Meetup has various get-togethers and discussion groups. Several upcoming events. (www.meetup.com/Marietta-Atheists-Meetup)

The Peachtree City Humanists participate in social and educational activities such as dinners, lunches, coffees, outdoor recreation, discussion groups, and book clubs with topics that include science, psychology, philosophy. (www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH)

The Southern Crescent Freethinkers sponsor *Navigators, Owl & Ibis: A Confluence of Minds*, and meet for dinner, etc. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.com/Southern-Crescent-Freethinkers)

Atlanta Astronomy Club will meet at Atlanta Freethought Hall on Sat, Nov 11 3-5 unless otherwise noted. Check website for more info. (www.atlantaastronomy.org)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** Sun, Nov 12, 6 pm, Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths)

will meet Mon., Nov 13, 7 pm at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Rd, Lawrenceville. Topic: The Moral Order of the Universe. To find out about future meetings, go to the Meetup page. (www.meetup.com/brights-295)

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter meets on Sat, Nov 11 at 1 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA. 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)

Black Nonbelievers will have their General Meeting at Little Five Points Community Center, 1083 Austin Ave NE, Atlanta on Sun, Nov 19, 3 pm. The special guest will be Eric

Leach from Nomadic Boy Productions. Eric (who is atheist), is working on a documentary titled "Alarm Clock: Religion's Influence on Black Americans", and will be interviewing members of BN. More information on this production can be found at www.alarmclockdocumentary.com. (www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers/)

Sunday Assembly Atlanta will have a general assembly (Topic TBA) Sun Nov 19, 5:30 pm at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr NE, Atlanta. This is also a potluck supper. All are welcome. SAA is an extremely active community with a large number of upcoming events including rock chorus, secular support, mindfulness meditation, wonder club, urban wonder, book club, makers night out, volunteering, queer beyond belief group, public speaking series, trivia nights, etc. (www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly)

Ethical Humanists of Atlanta is meeting Sun, Nov 26 12:30 pm at Jack's Tower, 1209 North Highland Avenue, Atlanta to have a conversation on ethical living. They meet every 4th Sunday. (www.meetup.com/Ethical-Humanists-of-Atlanta)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** Sun, Nov 26, 4 pm, 5 Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Prado Shopping Center, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

Atlanta Skeptics has "Drinking Skeptically" on the first Friday of each month. 5 Seasons Brewing, Prado Shopping Center, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics)

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

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)

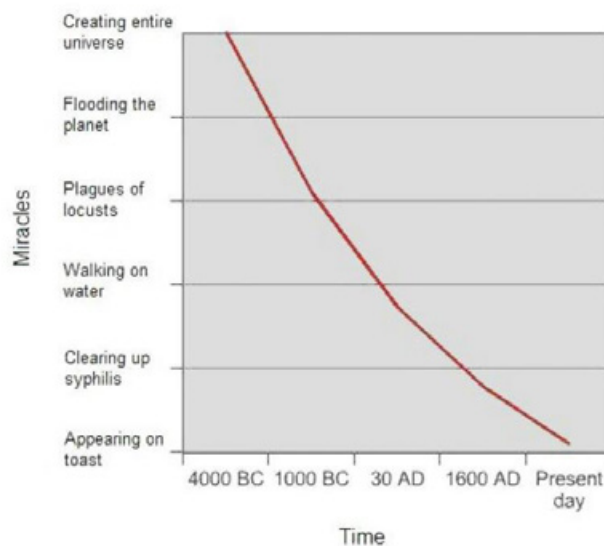
(www.fellowshipofreason.com)

Gainesville Atheists does not have a meetup scheduled at presstime. (www.meetup.com/Secular-Atheist-Study-the-Scriptures-SASS-Gainesville)

Freedom From Religion Foundation of Georgia does not have a meetup scheduled at presstime; check Meetup and Facebook. (www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia)

Americans United for Separation of Church and State does not have a meeting scheduled at presstime. Check Meetup and Facebook. (www.meetup.com/americansunited-georgia)

God's Career



Become a Member!

(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!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

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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AFS Art Display Program

4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339
www.atlantafreethought.org afs@atlantafreethought.org

Person or entity displaying art: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

Email: _____

Description of artwork (subject, color, dimensions, weight, frame, price, materials, other info — list on separate page if necessary): _____

Display dates: from _____ to _____

Owner if other than above: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

Email: _____

Is artwork for sale? Yes / No \$ _____ Upon sale owner agrees to pay AFS a 33.3% fee.

Terms: All artwork displays will be submitted to Atlanta Freethought Society art committee for approval (afs@atlantafreethought.org). Installation & removal will be done by artist/owner overseen by AFS art committee. Damage to building will be repaired by artist/owner. The owner assumes all risk for artwork at all times. AFS will not be responsible for any damage or loss while artwork is in our possession.

Owner agrees to terms: _____

Signature/date _____

AFS Art Committee approval: _____

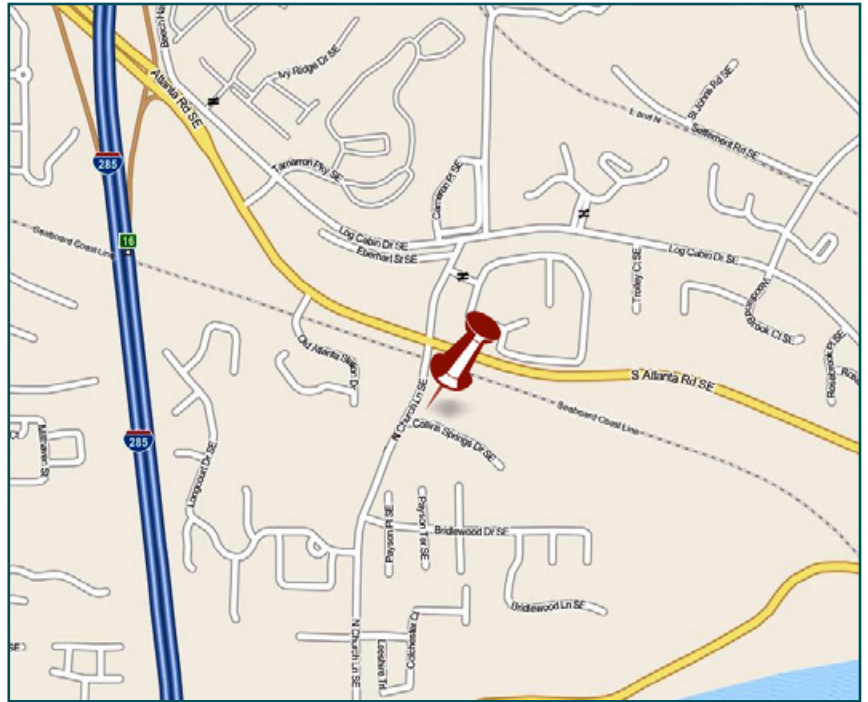
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**November 12th meeting
1:00 at AF Hall
(Potluck at 12:00),
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

Connie Venuso



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