

FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY, INC.

An organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area

Our Motto: “To Question is the Answer.”

Post Office Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591
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The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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December 2010

Volume 8, Issue 12

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President's Message - December 2010

Earl Coggins

Here we are at the end of another year. Life seems to be like the movie *Groundhog Day*, where every day becomes an endless loop of repetition.

In the movie, a 1993 comedy starring Bill Murray, his character, Phil Connors, a Pittsburg TV weatherman, gets trapped in some kind of time loop where he relives the

same day over and over. At first confused, Murray's character decides to behave, or better put, misbehave in any manner that suits him because there will be no consequences by

That gets old fast, and Connors soon grows despondent, attempting several times to commit



suicide. Connors confides in a friend he is romantically interested in, telling her about the time loop. His friend,

played by Andie MacDowell, suggests that he change his behavior.

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“After some thinking about my thinking and lots of reflection, I realized that I could use religious holidays as a way to promote plurality instead of extremism.”

“Believing there is no God gives me more room for belief in family, people, love, truth, beauty, sex, Jell-O, and all the other things I can prove and that make this life the best life I will ever have.”

— [Penn Jillette](#)

December 2010 Meeting • Party • No Lecture

Seventh Annual Human Light Celebration

Bring a dish to share • Bring a beverage of choice

Monday, December 20, from 6:00 to 9:30 p.m.

Social Hour at 6 p.m. • Dine at 7 p.m. • Ceremonies at 8 p.m.

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL
 (Downstairs in the Social Hall - Doors open at 6:00)



Humanist Book Discussion Group



When: 2:00 p.m., the first Sunday of each month

Where: **BORDERS BOOKS**, 8801 Southside Blvd. • 904-519-6500

What: Books planned for discussion:

- January 2, 2011 - Articles, poems, or books of your choice for discussion
- February 6, 2011 - *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, by Julian Jaynes

Books may be found in the library, may be purchased from local book stores, or purchased online. The First Coast Freethought Society will receive a small remuneration from your purchase (at no additional cost to you) if you first go to <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/> and then click the link to Amazon.com for your purchase.

At the heart of this classic, seminal book is Julian Jaynes's still-controversial thesis that human consciousness did not begin far back in animal evolution but instead is a learned process that came about only three thousand years ago and is still developing. The implications of this revolutionary scientific paradigm extend into virtually every aspect of our psychology, our history and culture, our religion—and indeed our future. (From the product description at Amazon.com)

More info, contact Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553.

First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Nonmembers may receive three hard-copy issues free, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication. The officials of the FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. The *FreeThinker* is intended to convey ideas that stimulate thought and promote discussion on a variety of subjects.

We welcome submissions. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the following month's issue. Submit contributions by e-mail or by U.S. mail to Fred Hill, 1817 Egner St.,

Jacksonville, FL 32206.

ADVERTISING RATES: *Eighth-page (business card size) \$25.00, quarter-page \$50.00, half-page \$75.00, and whole page \$100.*

To advertise, contact Patrice Bennett, 904-352-7005, or PBennett@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

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(President's Message - December 2010
Continued from page 1)

ior and attempt to do as much good each day as possible, using the daily loops as feedback to improve his personality.

I don't see how anyone can watch this movie without seeing the obvious connection to the repetitive nature of our lives. Every year it's more of the same: New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and oh, don't forget thirteen full moons.

Up until a few years ago, every December I would get very depressed. December meant the holiday season, and the holiday was Christmas. I, not being a Christian, didn't celebrate it. I felt like a cat at the dog pound, surrounded by loud, obnoxious, noise-making natives barking strange utterances every few minutes. Every time someone said "Merry Christmas," I wanted to run and hide. I wish I had chosen that option. Instead, I would ultimately get into a lengthy debate about the merits of saying such an expression with anyone uttering it.

Each December I was given yet another opportunity to hone my craft, much like what went on in the movie *Groundhog Day*.

One of the attributes associated with critical thinking is the necessity to think about thinking, which I started doing a few years ago, on the subject of how a nonreligious

someone yells out, and you know they will, "Merry Christmas!"

I started to realize that my hostility towards anything religious, or any religious verbal expression, had a lot to do with occurrences I had experienced in the past with hostile religious people who were not very receptive to my atheistic world view. I had been chastised and treated poorly for nothing more than a mind crime—thinking differently. My reaction was to treat ALL religious people the way A FEW bigoted religious people had treated me. I had unwittingly become one of them, an extremist.

After some thinking about my thinking and lots of reflection, I realized that I could use religious holidays as a way to promote plurality instead of extremism. I have been honing my craft on each religious holiday and have escaped the *Groundhog Day* repetition of the past. Now when someone blurts out Merry Christmas I just smile. It makes people wonder what you're thinking. Sometimes they even ask, and that's when I say: "Have you ever seen the movie *Groundhog Day*?"



Bill Murray and furry friend

person should behave around religious persons. Should I be hostile to their world view, or should I accept it? How should I behave when some part or parcel of a religious world view is brought up in conversation? So began a journey that has yet to end regarding things like how to react when people say "bless you" after I sneeze, or "Happy Easter" on or near the spring equinox, and what to do at each winter solstice when



Prayers in City Hall

Curtis Wolf

It seems that with the Jacksonville City Council, the more things change, the more they stay the same! After being threatened with a lawsuit and encountering considerable criticism of its pro-Christian prayer bias, City Council President Jack Webb saw the writing on the wall and crafted a more inclusive City Council invocation policy. As noted in his new policy, “legislative invocations must not be exploited to proselytize or advance any one faith or belief, or to disparage any other faith or belief, and must not create the impression that the legislative body is affiliated, or intends to affiliate, with any particular faith or belief.” It sounds promising, but has the promise been kept?

I guess the first clue that everything was not what it seemed was the way that the list of congregations that are eligible for giving invocations before City Council was compiled. Webb used the Yellow Pages, the Internet, information gathered from local Chambers of Commerce, chaplains, and written requests for inclusion to compile the list. The good news is that the list includes many of the non-

mainstream religions; however, it talks about everything but the kitchen sink!

Sure, I suppose that we could chalk up all this to inclusiveness above and beyond the call of duty, but here is what it gets us. The congregation list contains 977 entries as of November 27, 2010. It would take 40 years for every congregation on the list to get its chance to appeal to its favorite deity at a City Council meeting. Add to this the fact that

“Alas, however, the Supreme Court does not agree with us on the constitutionality of City Council invocations so we are stuck with these prayers for now ...”

most of the congregations on the list are Christian, and Webb stands a good chance of keeping non-mainstream religions out of City Council chambers for a long time! It is always difficult to infer motivations from actions, but it is a safe bet that this was intentional.

Why is this important? It is important because having non-controversial invocations is a safe policy for our City Council. Try to imagine a Muslim

prayer being spoken at a City Council meeting. The reason you are having so much trouble doing so is that we live in the Bible Belt, and a Muslim invocation would not happen here without a lot of hysteria about this being a Christian nation and surely God will condemn the United States for allowing



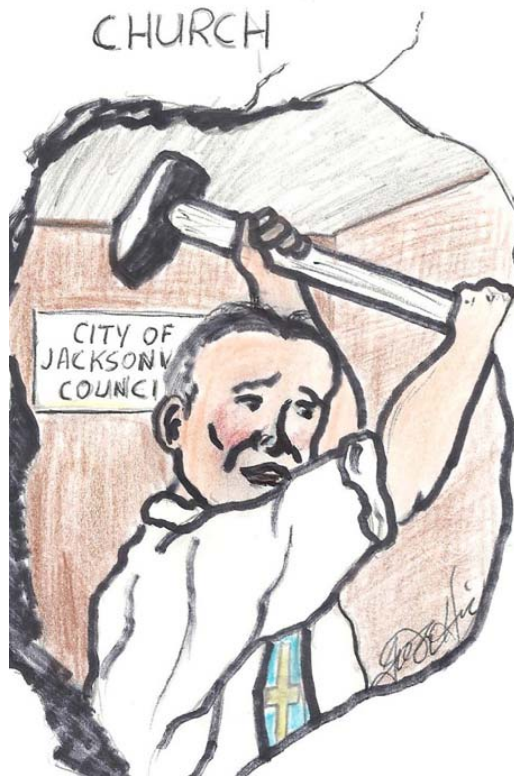
a prayer to Allah to take place at a government meeting. What City Council president would want this kind of hassle? This explains why we have had only one non-Christian invocation since the new policy took place on July 27, and that was by a Jewish rabbi. But hey, that is OK because we are talking about one of God’s chosen people, right?

Why should we care about the inclusiveness of the prayer policy? Like many freethinkers, I believe that the government should stay secular and therefore, any prayer before an official government body is a violation of the separation of church and state. So the manner in which these prayers take place is really not that

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important, since the prayers should not be occurring at government meetings in the first place, right?

Alas, however, the Supreme Court does not agree with us on the constitutionality of City Council invocations, so we are stuck with these prayers for now, and the courts will likely not be any help to us any time soon. Any change to the invocation policy will have to come about through political pressure. This means that if we want to see any changes to this policy, we need to push the City Council outside its comfort zone. A prayer by a Muslim or a Wiccan, or any of the numerous non-mainstream religious practitioners, at a City Council meeting would do that and likely result in a loud and messy uproar by the Christian nation true believers. The difficult budget



“Oh, I’m all for inclusion! That’s why I’ve got to tear down this wall and let all those other congregations in to say prayers before we do any work here in City Hall.”

years ahead for Jacksonville

alone will lead to more than enough uproars over increased taxes, so this is one headache that Webb and his successors would like to avoid. So, could more uproar lead to the end of City Council prayers? Maybe not, but it is at least worth a try!

You have probably heard of RINOs. RINO stands for “Republican In Name Only,” which is a way of saying that actions by certain Republicans are not consistent with Republican principles. What we are seeing in Webb’s new invocation policy is an IINO which stands for “Inclusive In Name Only.” It would be to our advantage to put pressure on Webb to ensure that his policy actually does lead to more inclusiveness, so that he cannot take the easy way out and claim to be inclusive when he has no intention of following through on it.



Ancient City Humanists - Attention St. Aug. Freethinkers!

Sharon Fair, PT, PhD

The recently-formed St. Augustine-based Atheist Meetup Group known as the “Ancient City Freethinkers and Humanists” (ACFH) is now a not-for-profit entity known simply as the Ancient City Humanists. Its mission is to provide people with opportunities to meet

and socialize with other humanists (who are also atheists or agnostics) and thereby enhance their well-being; to contribute to the local community and otherwise endeavor to enhance humankind; and to enhance the public awareness and perception of secular humanists.

Socials are held monthly at varying times, and busi-

ness meetings are held on an as-needed basis on the 4th Monday of the month.



To learn more about the Ancient City Humanists and its activities, please visit:

<http://www.meetup.com/humanist/>



Neighborly Caroling

Jessica Zellers

Holidays are here again, or at least the Abrahamic ones. I had promised to keep this month's submission shorter than last month's, so in place of an article I thought I'd help you save time. The holidays bring cooking, decorating, and shopping—things I can't help everyone with. However, if you are planning on a neighborly evening of having doors not open to you.... eerrr ah, caroling, then I have your song sheet put together. Just print the newsletter and you're ready to go.

Warning: Not necessarily for children.

Frosty the Craftman

Frosty the craftman was
an omniscient guy,
With a perfect plan when
anything goes
And two eyes set on his goal.

Frosty the craftman is a fairy
tale, they say,
He was made of straw but the
children
know how he came to life one
day.

They must have needed
magic in that
Old big book they found.

For when they repeated what
they read,
He began to dance around.

Oh, Frosty the craftman
Was live what he should be?
And the children say he
should laugh
And play just the same as you
and me.



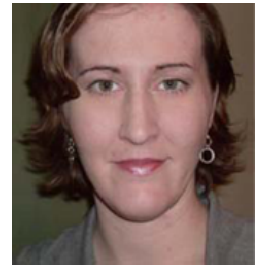
Crampetty cramp cramp,
Crampetty crapp crapp,
Who let Frosty go!?

Thumpetty thump thump,
Thumpetty thump thump
Over the thrill of Frosty.

Frosty the craftman knew
The scam was hard to sell,
So he said, "Kneel daily and
no meat on Thursdays.
Now to save yourselves!"

Down to the village,

With gold
bounty in
his hand
Running here
and there
all
Around the
square saying,
Just clear thought to ban!



He led them down the streets
of town
Right to the Reason cop.
And he only paused a mo-
ment when
He heard Reason holler
"Away!"

For Frosty the craftman
Had to hurry on his way,
But he waved goodbye saying,
"Don't you try,
I won't come back some day"

Thumpetty thump thump,
Thumpetty thump thump,
Look at Frosty go!!

Thumpetty thump thump,
Thumpetty thump thump,
Over the cheers of joy.

Away on the [HMS] Beagle

Away on the Beagle
A roommate he dread
The Captain Fitzroy
Headed south on the ship

The stars in the bright sky
Look under rock where he
stray
O' naturalist Charley

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Discovery on the way.

The main sail is blowing
What do changes make?
But nothing is known of
Mendel's big break.

O' Charley, tag the
birds
And two decades
they fly
And stay by my
side,
To tell not a lie.

Silent Night

(Instrumental—Song sheet
not available)

Jolly Ole St News-for-us

Jolly Ole St News-for-us
Lean your blog this way,

Don't you tweet a single soul
What I'm going to say.
The Daily News will soon be
here,
Now that darn old rag.



Whisper what you'll bring to
me,
Tell me if you brag.

When the clock is striking
eleven,
When Tea Party boils over,

Down in Chile a mine, escape
lacked
BP will slowly seep.
Gore scandal-less divorce
Denver now has Tebow.

Oprah will be the fin-
ished one.
You'll be sure to
know.

Half an end to
Harry Potter.
I am not a witch.
Pope says con-
doms are ok,
Only if you get
paid.

As for me, I
hardly know,
So I'll go to rest;
Choose for me, dear
Santa News,
What you think is
best.



Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners for Doubters

Sign up to attend or to host a dinner yourself. If a dinner is scheduled, sign-up sheets will be found at the back table at the monthly meetings. For details on how this works, **see page 7 of the July 2008 FreeThinker**, available on the website, or ask a greeter at the back table.

Secular Sunday Morning in the Park (or Atheist Sunday Morning)

Freethinkers... let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 10 a.m. until ? at the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257, between Shad and Losco Roads. Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 904-733-5489 or Google the address to get a map and directions. We generally provide coffee. Bring a breakfast snack and **a chair or two**. Note, if it's too hot under the pavilion, we take our chairs to some trees with a nice breeze. Mark your calendar. We hope to see you there!

Caring Tree

If a telephone call to a member is in order, or if a sympathy card, flowers, or some form of support is needed, please contact **Judy Hankins** at 904-724-8188, or e-mail her at JHankins@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org, or leave a notation on a meeting sign-in sheet.

Religion, Fear, and Freedom of Speech

Shane Christian

Earl Coggins' President's Message of November 2010 brought up some very good points. Although the First Amendment provides freedom of speech and expression, we as atheists, agnostics, humanists and freethinkers must be mindful of what we say in public or around coworkers. As the number of nonbelievers in the world rises, the religions of the world continue

to demonize atheism. During a recent visit to England, Pope Benedict XVI associated atheism with the crimes of the Nazi regime during World War II. The pope referred to a "Nazi tyranny that wished to eradicate God from society and denied our common humanity to many, especially the Jews." He went on to urge the UK to guard against "aggressive forms of secularism."

Responding to the papal diatribe, Richard Dawkins wrote, "This statement by the pope, on his arrival in Edinburgh, is a despicable outrage. Even if Hitler had been an atheist, his political philosophy was not based upon athe-

ism and had no connection with atheism. Hitler was arguably (and by his own account) a Roman Catholic. In any case he enjoyed the open support of many of the most senior Catholic clergy in Germany and the less demonstrative support of Pope Pius XII. Even if Hitler had been an atheist (he certainly was not), the rank and file Germans who carried out the attempted extermination of the Jews were Christians, almost to a

[popes-first.html](#)),

In his Second Encyclical from Pope Benedict, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI strongly criticized modern-day atheism, saying it had led to some of the "greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice" ever known to mankind. Unsurprisingly, the Pope made no mention of all of the cruelty



and violations of justice committed by the Catholic church over the past fifteen hundred years.

In other recent religious news, last September the "Quran Burn-

ing Day" triggered a media frenzy throughout the United States. There was widespread fear that the burning of the Quran would place our troops and American travelers abroad in danger from radical Muslims. While people from all walks of life were condemning the burning of the Quran, one young and lovely Muslim woman stepped up and wrote an article for The Daily Beast.com titled, "Get Over the Quran Burning." Asra Q. Nomani, author of *Standing Alone: An American*

"Violent acts and threats of violence by Muslims around the world are causing television stations and magazine and newspaper publishers to think twice about what they publish in the media, relative to the Muslim belief."

man: either Catholic or Lutheran, primed to their anti-Semitism by centuries of Catholic propaganda about "Christ-killers" and by Martin Luther's own seething hatred of the Jews. To mention Ratzinger's membership of the Hitler Youth might be thought to be fighting dirty, but my feeling is that the gloves are off after this disgraceful paragraph by the pope." ([http://nutsand-reasons.blogspot.com/2010/09/richard-dawkins-reacting-to-](http://nutsand-reasons.blogspot.com/2010/09/richard-dawkins-reacting-to)

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Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam, wrote, "We, as Muslims, need to tear a few pages out of the Quran, symbolically at least, by rejecting literal adherence to certain problematic verses." In her article, she highlighted a few Quran verses that she thought were no longer appropriate in the 21st century.

Although the Quran burning by Gainesville preacher Terry Jones was called off, two preachers in Nashville, Tennessee, Reverend Bob Old and Danny Allen, went through with a public burning of the Quran with little or no reaction or retaliation from extremist Muslims. The local news stations that covered the Quran burning made it clear that they were not going to broadcast the actual burning of the Quran. And why not? Violent acts and threats of violence by Muslims around the world are causing television stations and magazine and newspaper publishers to think twice about what they publish in the media relative to the Muslim belief. This year Comedy Central received death threats from Muslims after the airing of a South Park episode depicting Muhammad in a teddy bear costume.

In 2006, England passed a law criminalizing any action that could incite religious hatred. The law was first put to use in September 2010, when six British men were arrested after a video of a Quran burning was placed on YouTube. The identity and location of



the perpetrators were revealed in the video when one of the masked men yelled out the name of the city they were in. In November 2010, a fifteen-year-old British girl was arrested after she had set a Quran on fire and posted the video on Facebook. I wonder if England considered arresting Christopher Hitchens when he published his book, *God is not Great?*

Year after year, the Organization of the Islamic Conference keeps pushing the United Nations to enact a religious anti-defamation plan that would bar, worldwide, all criticism of their founder Muhammad and his teachings. Islamic nations would like to impose their Shariah blasphemy code upon the entire world if they could. Even in the United States, there are radical fundamentalist Christians who would like to criminalize blasphemy against Christianity.

The best way for any cult to control what information is received by its members is to do everything possible to isolate its members from the outside world or to silence any information that is in conflict with the teachings of the cult. We have seen, over the past decade, that violence and intimidation from radical Islamic groups have had an impact on our freedom of speech here in America. When it becomes criminal to burn the American flag, Christian Bible, or the Quran, then the radical groups have succeeded in silencing freedom of speech, expression, and free thought.



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Statement of Purpose

The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. is an educational, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to supporting nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area and promoting a nontheistic approach to everyday life.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, upstairs in the sanctuary, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211, (904) 725-8133. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public. Doors open at 6:00 p.m.

For other activities besides monthly meetings, please see the website, brochure, or newsletter!

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December Social

Where: OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, near the Avenues Mall.
When: **Tuesday December 28, 2010** at 6:00 p.m. Proceed directly to our room. **Drinks at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00.** (Order from the menu.)
RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by **Tues. a.m.**, if you plan to go!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 419-8826

2011 Membership Application



Name		Date	
Home address	City	State	Zip Code
E-mail address	Home phone	Business phone	
Occupation	Areas of interest and/or expertise		
How did you hear about us? Comments? _____			

Membership level (please select one):

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior - 65+ (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family (\$45/yr.) | | |

Do you object to your name appearing on our membership list, distributed to other members? Yes No

I'm interesting in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):

- General member Committee member Officer Financial supporter

- Annual dues cover the period of **January 1 through December 31**.
- The initial dues for new members joining in **July through September** are half the regular rates. Membership extends to the end of the current calendar year.
- The initial dues for new members joining in **October through December** are the full, regular rates. Membership extends to the end of the following calendar year.

***You can make a lasting impact on the future of
freethought and secular humanism in this community
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.***

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area. Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-419-8826 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

2010 Freethought Events of Interest on the First Coast

Monday	Dec. 20	FCFS Monthly Meeting - Human Light Celebration - 6:30 p.m.
Monday	Dec. 21	JAM Meetup at Le Jardin on Park, Jacksonville - 6:30 p.m.
Sunday	Dec. 26	FCFS Deadline to submit articles for January 2011 <i>FreeThinker</i>
Sunday	Dec. 26	FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville - 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday	Dec. 27	FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville - 6:00 p.m.
Sunday	Jan. 2	FCFS Humanist Book Discussion Group, Jacksonville - 2:00 p.m.
Sunday	Jan. 9	FCFS Annual Planning Meeting, Jacksonville - 10:00 a.m.
Monday	Jan. 24	FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jax - 6:30 p.m. NOTE: 4th Monday

The Ancient City Humanists • <http://www.meetup.com/humanist/>

First Coast Freethought Society (FCFS) • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>

Jacksonville Atheist, Agnostic, Secular Meetup Group (JAM) • <http://www.jaxatheists.com/>

Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason (NeFCoR) • <http://NorthEastFloridaCoR.org/>

The FCFS is a proud member of the Humanists of Florida Association
and the Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason

Election Results

Congratulations and heartfelt thanks to the dedicated individuals serving on our 2011 FCFS Board!

President - Earl Coggins

Vice President - Carrie Renwick

Secretary - Patrice Bennett

Treasurer - Stephen Peek

At-Large Member #1 - Fred Hill

At-Large Member #2 - Richard Keene

At Large Member #3 - Alex Mabee

Annual Planning Meeting - January 9, 2011

Mark your calendars and plan to attend the **FCFS Annual Planning Meeting**, at 10:00 a.m., at the home of the Renwicks. We will be discussing programs for 2011, fundraising strategies, and plans for the future. If you are coming, please let Carrie know. carrieren@att.net or call 904-268-8826.

Note: The January meeting is the 4th Monday - Jan. 24!

Back by overwhelmingly popular demand is **DR. PARVEZ AHMED!** You will not want to miss this timely meeting and the opportunity to talk with Dr. Parvez and have your questions answered.