

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
Website: <http://FirstCoastFreethoughtSociety.org>

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The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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The Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

January 2011

Volume 9, Issue 1

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President's Message - January 2011

Earl Coggins

I want to wish everyone a happy, safe, and prosperous 2011. Instead of my usual message, I'd like to start the New Year out with

a page of queries in honor of our motto, "To Question is the Answer." Having said

that, here are a few questions to answer.

Why should I question anything? Do I need answers? Is it meaningful to question everything? Anything? How can I know that I am asking valid questions? How do I vali-

question? If questioning is the answer, why do some people refuse to



do it? Why are some people opposed to questions? Do they have something to hide? Will I gain knowledge by questioning? Is knowledge important? Is there anything more important than knowledge? Why

(Continued on page 3)

"Why do some people call themselves freethinkers, while others don't? What is a freethinker? Why do I call myself a freethinker? Why do people think?"

"In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments. There are consequences."
Robert G. Ingersoll

January 2011 Meeting

"More Dialogue with a Muslim: Discussion Continues"

Back by Popular Demand

Parvez Ahmed, Ph.D., Member, Jacksonville Human Rights Commission; Board Member, OneJax; Associate Professor of Finance at University of North Florida; Fulbright Scholar; Muslim

Monday, January 24, 2011, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

**In the Sanctuary, upper parking lot level • Doors open at 6:00
Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL**

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:

- February 6, 2011 - *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, by Julian Jaynes
- March 6, 2011 - *Idiot America*, by Charles Pierce

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://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 Firstco@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553.

Note: The January meeting is the 4th Monday this month - 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.

Comments & Correction

I am confused by the statement on page 4 of the November Newsletter in the article, "Pledging Allegiance to One Nation Under God." Specifically, "The most recent Supreme Court ruling on the matter came in March of 2010..."

I think Mr. Clarke may have meant to refer to a March 11,

2010 decision of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals rather than identifying it as a decision of the Supreme Court. So far as I know, the Supreme Court has not ruled on the Pledge issue. The last time they were presented with a petition for certiorari on the issue they rejected taking the case without saying why.

Bernie McCarthy

Research on this issue indicates your information is correct, Bernie. Our thanks for sharing your knowledge on the matter. We welcome all comments, including requests for clarification on topics covered in past articles or corrections. Comments may be emailed to Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Fred W. Hill



*(President's Message - January 2011
Continued from page 1)*

is anything important? Does anything matter? How do I know? How do you know? How do we know? Why do I care what you know or what you think? Why do I care about the thoughts of anyone? What does it mean to care? Should I care about other people? Other living things? Does caring about people mean I am a social being? What does it mean to be social? Is it good to be social? What does it mean to be? To be or not to be, is that a valid question? Is it important to be? To be what? What if I don't feel the importance? Why do feelings vary from person to person?

Why do some people call themselves freethinkers, while others don't? What is a freethinker? Why do I call myself a freethinker? Why do people think? Why do they think differently? Why are some thoughts considered free? What does the word free mean? Can a person be truly free? When are thoughts less than free? What kinds of thoughts are not free? Are thoughts bad if they're not free thoughts? Evil? To be avoided? Why are some people obsessed with how others think? Why do some people attempt to suppress the thoughts of others? If my thoughts are suppressed, has my life been devalued? Am I my thoughts? If I can't think, am I no longer alive, no longer human, even if I can still breathe? If I don't think like you, am I a bad person? Why do people

quarrel over differences in thinking? Will the quarreling ever stop? Why does the quarreling frequently become violent? Are humans inherently violent? If so, how do we explain non-violent humans? If violence is irrational, does that mean humans are inherently irrational?



Can a person consider oneself non-violent, yet have an occasional burst of violence? Does verbal violence count as violence? Is the concept of verbal violence really violence, or an attempt to make a mountain out of a molehill? After all, any speech can be ignored, yes? Why do people yell at each other? Could they learn to stop? Is yelling at someone misbehaving? How is one supposed to behave? Why do humans need police? No other life forms on the planet seem to need police, so does that make us inherently hostile? Aggressive?

Why do we live such a short amount of time compared with the amount of time that has already elapsed and the amount of time yet to come? Does a long life give it meaning? What is the meaning of life? Why does meaning matter? Do we need to have meaning? Can't we just be? Be alone? Can a person be alone and not be lonely? Is the universe a lonely place? Does the universe care about me? You? Us? Can the universe become one with me? Should I be thinking about the universe? Should I be doing something while I am alive in the universe? What am I supposed to be doing? Anything? Why do I feel compelled to write? Why are some writings banned? Who has the right to ban writing? Why should any form of communication be banned? Who does the banning and how did this person or persons get appointed? What should you or I do when encountering the banning of our or someone else's speech? Should I become violent? How many more words will be suppressed or banned before humanity rises above its ability to suppress human expression? Why do humans oppress other humans? Will people ever be able to truly understand each other's culture, feelings, expressions, desires, and world views? Why are some people so quick to dismiss others' ideas? Jump to conclusions? Exclude the out-groups? When will we all be able to get along?



Believing Is Easier than Thinking

Beth Perry

We would be 1,500 years ahead if it hadn't been for the church dragging science back by its coattails and burning our best minds at the stake. Religious institutions have opposed virtually every major scientific advancement whether of a theoretical or technological nature. From the heliocentric theory of the solar system to biological evolution, from the lightning rod to anesthetics, science has always had to wait for religion to get out of its way. *Newsweek* writer Ana E. Azpuru's proposal that science has, at times, received the support of religion, and that the relationship between science and religion is like a harmless sibling rivalry, is simply a historical lie.

The most important issue politically at this moment is keeping church and state separate and the First Amendment intact. That amendment has been good for this country for over 200 years, and it will continue to be so as long as our legislatures don't fall under the control of religious zealots.

Jacksonville leaders are especially lax about observing the wall of separation between church and state. One instance is the free entrance to the Jacksonville Fair with a church bulletin. I fought this, one ignored voice, until I finally gave up, although I drafted some of my artist friends (the majority of whom are on the cusp if not free-

thinkers) and fought the public TV station doing the same thing with their Spring Festival at Metro Park one year. That practice occurred only that one time. People, no matter what their beliefs, seem not to think about mixing church and state until it is shown to them.

Another instance is our mayor's annual "Prayer Breakfast." The rally around the flag for morning prayer is another. It takes place on public property, as does the Mayor's breakfast. The venue rental payment for a Christian concert in protest of a Marilyn Manson concert some

between the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century and the early Renaissance of the 15th century became known as the Dark Ages because people were kept ignorant by the Roman Catholic Church, which dominated western Europe. (Despite claims to "Universalism" by both the Catholic and Orthodox churches, Christianity has been



splintering into squabbling factions nearly as long as it has existed.) Most people, including royalty, were no longer taught how to read or write. The bulk of the knowledge previously accumulated by the Greek and Roman civilizations was largely forgotten, even how to make concrete. Only monks and priests were educated, primarily to copy those ancient manuscripts considered worth preserving. Independent thinking was forbidden. Keep the people ignorant and they will believe anything! The proletariat were taught it was their duty to obey their lords without question, and thousands were kept busy building massive, beautiful cathedrals. While building these churches, the people were indoctrinated. If they were to enjoy their labors, they

"It is imperative that we non-believers no longer hide our lack of belief from others in fear of repercussions."

years ago was paid by taxes.

For many years, most of my life in fact, I was a firm believer in the trinity. Since babies are born atheists, and taught from age two about God, is it any wonder that so many of us are devout in our religious beliefs? I was. Most people are afraid not to believe, and I was no different. Then about 40 years ago, I enrolled at Florida Junior College. A course on World Religions opened my eyes.

The fallacies of religions were revealed to me. The era

(Continued on page 5)

had to believe. If they wanted to stay alive, they had to believe. To enter the church, they had to pay a tax of their very meager earnings. The church kept them not only ignorant, but desperately poor.

I also learned from Dr. Ted Reynolds, now deceased, that Christians chose December 25th as Jesus' birthday because it was already a popular holiday to celebrate the god Mithra's birthday. My curiosity began to

peak, and I took a course called Mysticism: East versus West. Hinduism has long had a god named Krishna. Notice how much Christ sounds like Krishna (possibly pure coincidence, since Christ derives from Greek for "anointed one," while Krishna is Sanskrit for "black" or "dark blue"). In further reading about religious history, I learned so many of Jesus' supposedly original quotations were plagiarized from Zoroaster, a prophet and philosopher who lived at least 500 years before Jesus in what is now Iran. People still quoted his teachings, so Jesus had ample opportunity to pick up on them, as well as those of the many other theologies circulating throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world of the first century C.E. Moreover, the no-

tion of gods mating with mortal women and siring human offspring and of men, including the Roman emperors of Jesus' reputed lifetime, becoming gods was common, even if most Jews, as well as some ancient skeptics, regarded such notions as sheer nonsense.

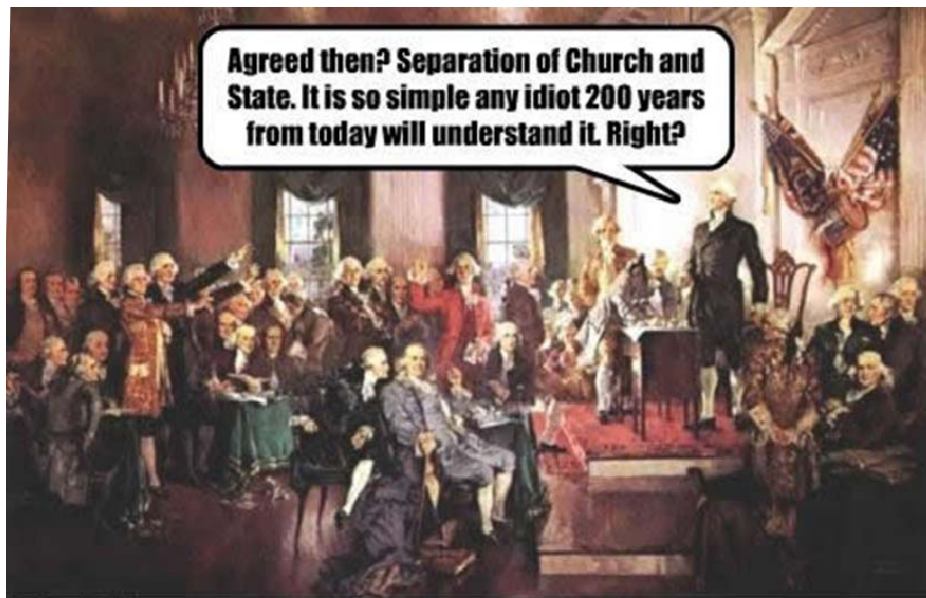
Of course, there were also the Crusades, the Inquisitions, and religious wars of every stripe that are still going on. It seems for many people, belief in

Plymouth colony, in 1620, to escape religious persecution...to believe as they saw fit, rather than a state religion which was being forced on them in England. When the United States was first chartered in the late 18th century, the Western world was in a period called the Enlightenment. Consequently, many founders of this nation were skeptical of the dominant religious beliefs of their day, including the divinity of Jesus and

the miracles attributed to him and multitudes of saints. They knew how the Christian kingdoms of Europe fought amongst themselves over religious doctrine. For instance, Maryland was the only colony that would allow people of the Jewish faith. Massachusetts ousted Baptist

Roger Williams, who escaped by the skin of his teeth from hanging and founded Plymouth Plantation, now known as Rhode Island. There were ministers such as Cotton Mather in many colonies accusing people on the flimsiest of evidence of practicing witchcraft or other profane activities, resulting in many executions here in the New World, echoing the witch-hunting mania of Europe.

Anxious to prevent the recurrence of such horrors in the



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something that cannot be seen, felt, or touched is stronger than any other. And along with all these is the belief that women are to be kept down. To be servile to men. Elizabeth Cady Stanton once said, "Woman's discontent increases in exact proportion to her development."

The first permanent English settlement in what would become the United States, contrary to popular belief, was founded for trade purposes as well as exploration. That was Jamestown, Virginia, founded in 1607. The Pilgrims did settle

(Continued from page 5)

fledgling United States, a majority of the delegates of the Continental Congress were intent on keeping religion and state separate, not only to protect people of other beliefs, but also to protect the varied minority religions spread across the new country from persecution by a majority religion with the backing of the state. Thus, this nation was created as a republic, not a theocracy, prohibiting Congress from making any law respecting the establishment of any religion. Consequently, this nation was not formed as a Christian nation, nor did our founding fathers intend it to be. They made the deliberate decision not to begin any State proceedings with public prayer. Benjamin Franklin wanted prayer instituted, but James Madison argued against it, feeling it would create dissention among Congress (both Franklin and Madison were nominally Episcopalians but adhered to Deist beliefs). Most of the Convention agreed with Madison, and a strong debate ensued. However it was never voted upon.

After our nation was formed, the hinterlands began to be developed. Along about the 1840s

came the evangelicals who went forth into the “wilderness” and set up campgrounds for the settlers to travel for miles to gather and spend a week socializing, and while doing so, the evangelists worked hard at teaching the supposed word of God. Many settlers lived hard, lonely lives, far from their neighbors in a landscape too dangerous to risk travel for mere socializing. So they looked forward to these camp meetings, large enough to be safe from the Natives who resented their presence in their ancient homelands. The Second Great Awakening was underway, and it has largely stuck, surviving setbacks such as the murder of Mormon founder Joseph Smith as well as the Great Disappointment, when Jesus Christ failed to show up as predicted by William Miller. The evangelical movement became more overtly political during the last 40 years under such charismatic zealots as the late Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, and James Dobson. All demanding their followers obey their oh so divine wisdom and cease thinking for themselves, teaching their deeply distorted takes on history, and insisting every word in the Bible is literal truth, promising the glories of heaven for all who tithe 10 per-

cent or more to their pockets and believe that Jesus died for the sins of mankind and will condemn all doubters to eternal damnation.

Evangelicals rail against abortion clinics, yet God told the Amalekites to kill all of a certain tribe with whom he was angry at the time, including “ripping apart the women with child, tearing the babies from their bellies.” It seems to me God must have believed in abortion. So why are the fundamentalists against it?

It is imperative that we non-believers no longer hide our lack of belief from others in fear of repercussions. More and more of us are speaking out, and now we are measured somewhere between 14 and 16 percent of the population. I know there are far more than that out there, and we need to let our voices be heard. I believe that the Religious Right, as scary as they are to us, with all their rhetoric, has strengthened the freethinkers to make themselves known. We need to encourage freethinkers to do so, as well as advertise our own FCFS by becoming more involved in public activities in order to publicize ourselves and to grow.



January Social

Where: OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, near the Avenues Mall.

When: **Tuesday January 25, 2011** 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!

Freethought Quotes from the Ages



“Believe nothing, O monks, merely because you have been told it, or because it is traditional, or because you

yourself have imagined it. Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher. But whatsoever, after due examination and analysis, you find to be conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings—that doctrine believe and cling to, and take it as your guide.

—*Gautama Buddha*
(c. 563 - 483 BCE)



They came with a Bible and their religion—stole our land, crushed our spirit, and now tell us we should be thankful to the “Lord” for being saved.

—*Chief Pontiac*
(c. 1720 - 1769)

* * * * *

“The establishment of religion clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Nei-

ther a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass

laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion.”

—*Justice Hugo Black,*
Majority opinion, Everson
v Board of Education
(1947)



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 Firstco@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org, or leave a notation on a meeting sign-in sheet.

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
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904-419-8826
<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

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!

FCFS 2011 Board Members

President	Earl Coggins	521-5039
Vice President	Carrie Renwick	268-8826
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Treasurer	Stephen Peek	742-5390
At-Large	Fred Hill	358-3610
At-Large	Richard Keene	386-1121
At Large	Alex Mabee	864-6198

Other Appointments

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E-mail Secretary	Carrie Renwick	268-8826

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Publicity	Carrie Renwick	268-8826
Website	Mark Renwick	616-2896

All FCFS personnel may be reached via e-mail at Firstco@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org.

First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Non-members may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Non-members 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.

Information for Contributors

We welcome submissions. Articles for consideration should be submitted via e-mail to the e-mail address shown below. Contributors who cannot submit manuscripts electronically may send them to Fred

Hill, 1817 Egner St., Jacksonville, FL 32206. The deadline for time-sensitive material is the FOURTH SATURDAY of each month for the following month's issue.

We prefer articles no longer than 1,000 words. Longer articles will be evaluated in terms of whether their importance and degree of interest to our readers warrant publication.

All accepted manuscripts are subject to editorial modification. Our style guide is *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Manuscript submissions cannot be returned. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.

E-mail for Submissions

Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

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 Firstco@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

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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://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

Upcoming Freethought Events of Interest on the First Coast

Monday	Jan. 24	FCFS Monthly Meeting - Human Light Celebration - 6:30 p.m.
Monday	Jan. 10	JAM Meetup at European Street Café in San Marco - 6:30 p.m.
Saturday	Jan. 22	FCFS Deadline to submit articles for January 2011 <i>FreeThinker</i>
Sunday	Jan. 23	FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville - 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday	Jan. 25	FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville - 6:00 p.m.
Sunday	Feb. 6	FCFS Humanist Book Discussion Group, Jacksonville - 2:00 p.m.
Monday	Feb. 21	FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jax - 6:30 p.m.

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

Year at a Glance - 2011 Meetings

Carrie Renwick

Let's take a look at the programs already lined up for 2011. You might mark your calendar now for the events that interest you. You will note, we still have some available months. If you have any suggestions for a speaker you'd like to hear, please let me know!

February 21 - Darwin's birth month! Dr. Tony Rossi of UNF will discuss evolution.

March 21 - Scott Shine will enlighten us about the Jacksonville Ethics Commission.

May 16 - Dr. David Simon, Research Fellow and retired sociology professor.

July 18 - We'll celebrate the Fourth of July with political science professor, Dr. Justin DePlato.

August 15 - Tallahassee's Dr. Elaine Hull will present, "The Neurology of Religious Experience."

December 19 - Eighth Annual Human Light Celebration.

University of North Florida's Dr. Jay Huebner is confirmed to speak to us about outer space but has not selected his date.