

[View this email in your browser](#)



**November 2014**

**Volume 13, Issue 11**

## Table of Contents

- [November Meeting](#)
- [November President's Message - Food Crazy](#)
- [November Olive Garden Social](#)
- [Carl Sagan Day 2014](#)
- [Local AU Update - Petition Campaign Continues](#)
- [Waking Up: A Book Review](#)
- [Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville](#)
- [Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine](#)
- [NPR Corporate Sponsorship Update](#)
- [About our newsletter, the First Coast FreeThinker](#)
- [Wilhelmina M. Walton \(1932-2014\)](#)
- [About the First Coast Freethought Society](#)
- [December Meeting - Human Light Celebration](#)
- [Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason](#)
- [Freethought Events on the First Coast](#)
- [Directions to Monthly Meeting](#)
- [Membership Application](#)

## November Meeting

- **What:** A one-act play, written and directed by Earl Coggins
- **Cast:** In the order of appearance: **Newt (Earl Coggins)** and **Zorba (David Schwam-Baird)**
- **Title:** "WAITING FOR A DONUT"
- **When:** Monday, November 17, 2014, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:00)

- **Where:** Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244 (Driveway located on Collins Rd., 400 feet east of Roosevelt Blvd.)

Meetings Free and Open to the Public • Plenty of Free Parking

---

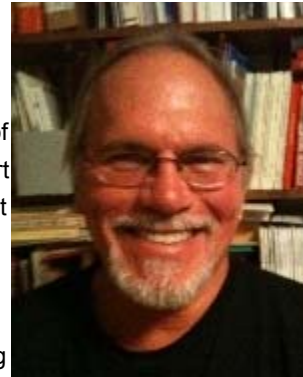
## Meeting Description

"Waiting for a Donut" is a witty, thoughtful play in one act, inspired by Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot." It is written and directed by Earl Coggins, President, First Coast Freethought Society. It is enacted by Earl Coggins and David Schwam-Baird, each playing a contemplative street person. "Waiting for a Donut" is an introspective journey into the complexity of a simple life.

## About the Cast

**Earl Coggins (Newt)** First Coast Freethought Society founder and president, Earl Coggins, states he has been a skeptic since he was about 8 years old. Over the years, voracious reading has shaped his philosophy and has honed his nonreligious worldview.

When the '80s gave rise to the Christian Coalition and May 1st was proclaimed a National Day of Prayer, Earl came out of the closet and began speaking out about nonbelief and the need for the separation of church and state. Recognizing the need for an organization to support nonreligious people in the Northeast Florida area, he founded the First Coast Freethought Society in September of 1998. He was its first president and has also served as vice president, secretary, board member-at-large, and spokesperson. He has currently served as president since 2008. "Waiting for a Donut" is the second play delving into various nonreligious worldviews that Earl has authored, and he is planning to write more.



**David Schwam-Baird (Zorba)** Dr. David Schwam-Baird (Zorba) has served as Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of North Florida since 2005. He received his B.A. in Philosophy at the University of New Orleans, his Masters in Public Administration at the School of Urban and Regional Studies, University of New Orleans, and his Ph.D. in Political Science from Tulane University. David has taught courses in Latin American politics, Middle East politics, and political philosophy. He is an author, is multilingual, and has lectured extensively. In addition, he is one of the charter members of the First Coast Freethought Society and has served as both vice president and president several times in the past. David has the distinction of having played the starring role in the Socratic Dialogues from Plato's *The Republic*.



# November President's Message - Food Crazy

**Guest Author: David R. Simon, Ph.D.**

*FCFS President Earl Coggins is taking a few months off from his President's Message responsibilities in order that he may devote the time to a play he is writing and directing, which is scheduled for our November monthly meeting. Thank you to FCFS member and friend David Simon for authoring this feature.*

Along with America's obsession with drugs and sex, there's a unique overreaction to food. One indication of this is that many bestselling books are diet books and cook books. This is a reflection of our yo-yo diet syndrome wherein people (90%) alternatively lose weight and then within a year regain it. The diet plan and weight loss nostrum sponsors have gotten around this sad truth by exclusively focusing on how much weight one can lose and how quickly, without lifestyle changes or exercise.

Most of these nostrums are manufactured by a nutraceutical industry that has managed to escape regulation by the Food and Drug Administration. This has allowed organizations like GNC to make all the claims they care to about any supplement, from water to muscle enhancers, to testosterone pills. Americans are thus forever being offered magic answers to complex issues. Many of these supplements are a waste of billions of dollars, while others are actually harmful. Let us discuss.

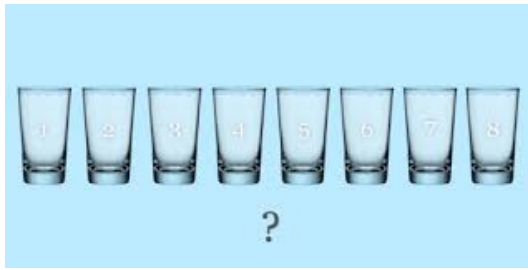


## Cool Clear Water

One would imagine that if there is one uncontroversial nutrient it would be water. From my earliest memory the word was to drink 8 cups of water a day. (Whether or not this is from the recommended 4 glasses of milk was never clarified to my generation). Now, the ultra-reputable Mayo Clinic has finally spilled the beans: "The 8 by 8 rule isn't supported by hard evidence, it remains popular because it's easy to remember."

Here's the problem. The amount of water one needs depends on a number of variables: one's size, the amount of time spent outdoors, and how active one is. Another important variable is that nearly all foods (especially fruits, vegetables, starches, and grains) contain water. A hydration study done in 2013 revealed the most hydrated person in the study ate a diet high in spaghetti (and probably marinara sauce). The point is that eating a diet high in these foods is hydrating. Likewise, bottled water costs 300 times more than tap water. Yet bottled water contains unfiltered tap water.

**Do we really need to drink this  
much water every day?**



## Protein and Muscle

There are many beliefs about proteins (amino acid chains), some of them true, others mythical. The most important proteins are termed by nutritionists “essential proteins.” Proteins contain 4 calories per gram and are not stored as fat. Instead they are used over and over in human cells. Proteins are very complex molecules that require a good chunk of calories to digest (usually 400 on a high protein diet) and one molecule of water for each molecule of protein ingested. Proteins usually remain in the human stomach for 4 hours making it the only truly satiating food.

Essential proteins are those that cannot be produced by the human body. The highest amounts of these are found in eggs and milk, but there are problems with these foods for many people. Eggs are highly allergic substances for many people, and many others cannot tolerate the sugar found in milk, lactose (this includes 93% of Jews).

But fear not. Fish, shell fish, beef, turkey (along with other edible birds), soy, yogurt, and certain other animals in which most humans have little interest (e.g., insects, frogs, and worms) also contain essential proteins. So-called health food bars often proudly advertise that they are high in protein. Yet their protein source is often from peanuts, which are really beans, and contain no essential protein.

Moreover, soy and milk protein are readily available in powder form in packages that promise their consumption will increase muscle mass. There is absolutely no evidence to support this claim. Adequate protein consumption is essential to prevent mental retardation in newborns.

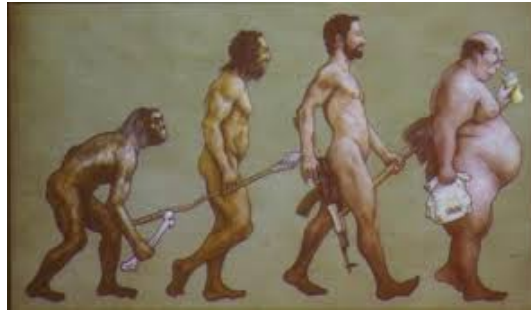
## Carbohydrates and Fiber

For many years, fat was labeled the villain of the century in the American diet. Now, more and more, simple carbohydrates are being labeled as contributors to diabetes, stroke, and heart disease.

Carbohydrates contain 4 calories per gram. Many fruits, grains, and vegetables fiber (cellulose and pectin) are essential for colon health (see below).

Humans began evolving in their present form about 225,000 years ago and ate whatever they could gather and hunt. At times they went without eating for periods. One solution to this problem was to develop an innate taste for sweets and carbohydrates plentiful in Africa (mainly fruits). There was many a time when our ancestors could not find food. Evolution’s solution to this problem was to develop the ability to store food as fat, so we would be able to survive in hard times. Fat also provided some insulation from the cold.

### **The evolution of human obesity.**



Now nearly 250,000 years later, at least for most people in Western nations, food is plentiful. In the U.S., nearly 70 percent of adults (according to some sources) are either overweight or obese. Part of this problem stems from a sedentary lifestyle. Only 25 percent of the adult population ever exercises. Our ancestors exercised constantly due to hunting, gathering, migrating, and (beginning about 10,000 years ago) farming. The American diet contains things that our ancestors never imagined: refined sugar and no fibers. The results are hypertension, diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

Thus while pie, cakes, cookies, brownies, and the like are delicious, they are also risky (especially for diabetics). The best carbohydrates to consume are called complex carbohydrates: low calorie grains, fruits, and vegetables that are low in calories and high in fiber.

## Fat Myths

Fats are made up of chains of fatty acids. Fat contains 9 calories a gram and is liquid at room temperature. There is a distinction made between polyunsaturated fats (mostly oils), monounsaturated fats (e.g., olive oil and peanut oil), and saturated fat (which is solid at room temperature). What distinguishes these 3 types of fat from each other concerns the amount of hydrogen atoms that fill the spaces between the fat molecules.

---

Mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/nutrition and healthy eating (3/12/14).

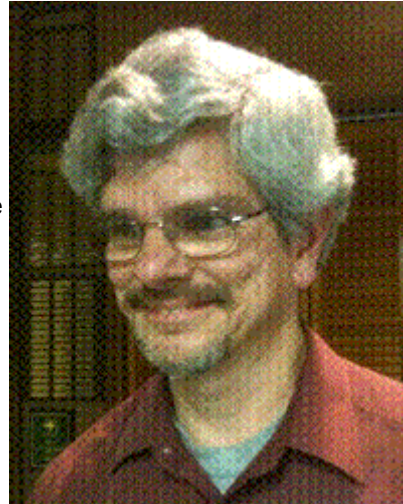
# November Olive Garden Social

- Where: **OLIVE GARDEN** on Philips Highway, across from the Avenues Mall. The hostesses will know where we are seated. Proceed directly to our room.
- When: Tuesday, **NOVEMBER 25**, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. Social hour at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00. We order from the menu.
- RSVP: E-mail [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) (or call 904-268-8826) by Tuesday morning, if you plan to attend!

# Carl Sagan Day 2014

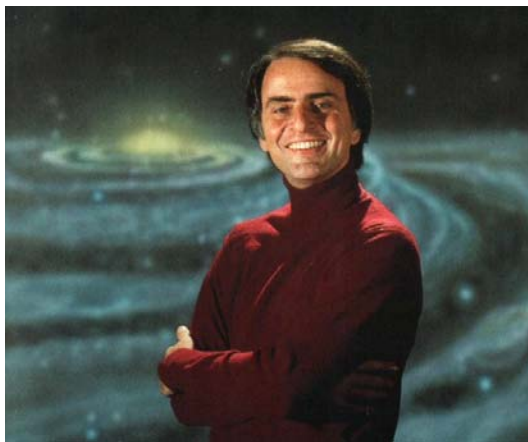
**Fred W. Hill**

Carl Sagan Day celebrates the life of perhaps one of the most famous astronomer, astrophysicist, cosmologist, and popularizers of science in the late 20th century. Held on or near the anniversary of Sagan's birth, November 9, 1934, activities have been held in several cities in the United States and Canada, including one in Clearwater, Florida, on Saturday, November 15, sponsored by local affiliates of the Center for Inquiry, of which Dr. Sagan was a founding member of one of its original branches, the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). See link below.



Sagan is best known for the 13 part TV series *Cosmos*, which has been viewed by over 500 million people in over 60 countries since its original broadcast on PBS stations in 1980. A follow up series, *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*, was broadcast earlier this year, hosted by Neil deGrasse Tyson, who like Sagan has specialized in the fields of astrophysics, physical cosmology, and science communication. The impulse to create the original series, as Sagan relates in his book, *Cosmos*, based on the TV series, was sparked by his dismay at the meager media attention to the results of the first exploration of Mars by spacecraft that orbited and landed on the planet in 1976. See:

<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/Tampa/events/CLEARWATER - Carl Sagan Day 2014/>



**Carl Sagan  
(1934-1996)**

Sagan had been an advisor to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration since its founding in 1958, tasked with briefing Apollo astronauts before their flights to the Moon and contributing to robotic spacecraft missions, including the Mariner program that explored Venus and confirmed his speculations that beneath its dense sulfuric clouds, our sister planet is very dry and hot rather than wet and swampy as previously imagined. Although skeptical of the notion that space aliens have visited our planet and even built pyramids and other ancient monuments, Sagan was optimistic that Earthlings might yet make contact with intelligent life-forms from other planets and initiated the project to include messages to such potential recipients in the Pioneer and Voyager program space probes, launched between 1972 and 1977, the first to explore Jupiter and Saturn and their moons, and one of which, Voyager 1, became, in 2012, the first man-made object to travel beyond our solar system into interstellar space.

As a member of the Viking Lander Imaging Flight Team investigating Mars, Sagan was excited by the images sent back by the space probes, even as they tended to reveal that the Red Planet was unlikely to have any form of life and had a pinkish-yellow rather than an Earthly blue sky. The lifelessness and dissimilarities of our nearest planetary neighbors to our own convinced most of the mainstream press that the public would have little interest in further revelations about them. Sagan, however, felt otherwise. "I was positive from my own experience," he wrote in his introduction to the 1985 paperback edition of *Cosmos* (p. xvii) that an enormous global interest exists in the exploration of the planets and in many kindred scientific topics – the origin of life, the Earth and the Cosmos, the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, or connection with the universe. And I was certain this interest could be excited through that most powerful of communications medium, television."



As noted above, *Cosmos* was very successful, and Sagan retained a high-profile in the public through many articles on scientific topics, including nuclear winter and global climate change, published in the nationally distributed newspaper supplement, *Parade Magazine*; appearances on several news and entertainment programs, including *Nightline* and *The Tonight Show* starring Johnny Carson, who was a big fan and was instrumental in popularizing the phrase "Billions and billions," attributed to Sagan but actually originated by Carson in a skit where he portrayed Sagan; many bestselling non-fiction books, including *The Demon-Haunted World* (1995) in which he discussed the dangers of pseudo-science and superstition and the role of real science as a "candle in the dark"; the science fiction novel *Contact* (1985), initiated as a screenplay by Sagan in 1979 and finally transformed into a commercially and critically successful film released in 1997, starring Jodie Foster and dedicated to the memory of Carl Sagan. All while also continuing his career as a professor at Cornell University, where he taught courses on science and critical thinking.

**From the 1997 movie starring  
Jodie Foster based on Carl  
Sagan's novel about the first  
contact between humanity and  
more technologically advanced  
extra-terrestrial life-forms.**



Critical thinking was vital to Carl Sagan. He remained optimistic about the future of humanity but was also very aware of our capacity for self-destruction and wallowing in ignorance and wishful thinking. Although he was born and raised in the United States, many of his Jewish relatives in Europe were murdered during the Holocaust of World War II. He was writing about the willful ignorance and distortions spread by conservative politicians and corporations regarding the human-based causes of global climate change over 20 years ago, and although the basic science of the topic has long been settled, the political debate continues to the increasing detriment of our future. Sagan decried the role of religion, in the past and present, in distorting and too often crippling our understanding of reality – our history, including that of our most distant ancestors – humanoid and not; as well as our world, the universe and our place in the cosmos on our “Pale Blue Dot” (the title of another of his books). “For me,” Sagan concluded, “it is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring.” (*The Demon-Haunted World*, p. 12)

Although Sagan died nearly 18 years ago, on December 20, 1996, his legacy as a scientist, educator, freethinker and advocate for critical thinking endures. On the Carl Sagan Day page on the CSI website, it is noted that, “In their posthumous award to Dr. Sagan of their highest honor, the National Science Foundation declared that his “research transformed planetary science...his gifts to mankind were infinite.” (<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/carlsaganday>)





# Local AU Update - Petition Campaign Continues

*In this regular feature, you will be kept apprised of the actions of the local AU chapters which include the Northeast Florida Chapter (Jacksonville) and the Clay County Chapter, should you wish to participate. If separation of church and state issues are important to you, we encourage you to join Americans United, on the local and/or national level.*

## A Local Meeting

Another strategy planning meeting of the Northeast Florida Chapter of Americans United is scheduled for the afternoon of Sunday, November 23, at a private residence in Jacksonville. To RSVP and to get meeting details and location, you can join the local chapter meetup group, [www.au.org/JAX-AU](http://www.au.org/JAX-AU), or contact the local chapter secretary, [au.ne.fl@gmail.com](mailto:au.ne.fl@gmail.com).

## The Petition and Facebook Campaign Continue

Thanks to everyone who has already signed the petition! We have over 300 signatures but we need to have more. If you have not yet signed it, there is still more time. Here is the information you need.

## United Not Divided

The Northeast Florida Chapter (Jacksonville) of Americans United for Separation of Church and State has formulated a petition drive and a Facebook page as part of a larger awareness campaign called **UNITED NOT DIVIDED**. The petition addresses the problem of Council President Clay Yarborough deciding to ignore the compromise reached by the ACLU and then Council President Webb concerning invocations before city council meetings. The purpose of **United Not Divided** is to convince the Jacksonville City Council members that the explicitly Christian invocations currently being given at City Council meetings are divisive and inappropriate. The Christian invocations should either be stopped; or, a policy of inclusion should be adopted, in which all religious and non-religious worldviews are represented in future invocations. You can show your support of **United Not Divided** in two different ways.

## Facebook Campaign

One component of the **United Not Divided** campaign is Facebook. You can send a friend request to the Northeast Florida Chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State's Facebook page dedicated to the City Council Invocation issue. Please share this Facebook page link with your friends, family, and anyone you think would want to support this cause. Or, simply go to the Facebook page and add yourself to it.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/uniteustocareaboutourcity/>

## Sign the Petition

The other crucial component of the **United Not Divided** campaign is a petition you can sign. We are urging everyone who cares about this issue to sign the petition and share the link to the petition with your friends and family. You do NOT need to be a Facebook participant in order to sign this petition. To sign the petition, click:

<http://www.change.org/p/sign-our-petition-in-the-name-of-unity>

Raise your voice with ours, as we call upon the City Council of Jacksonville to discontinue a practice that divides us, favors some of us over others, and tears apart the fabric of our community!

## To Join AU - Local or National

Local: <http://www.meetup.com/AU-Americans-United-for-Separation-of-Church-and-State/>

National: <https://support.au.org/donate>

# Waking Up: A Book Review

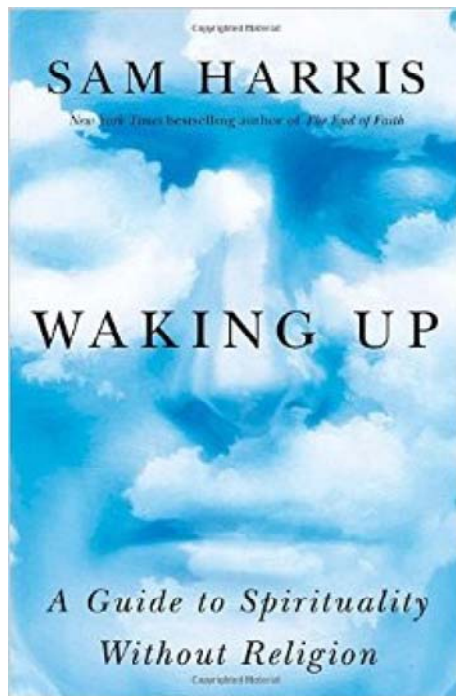
## Shane Christian

I have recently listened to the audio book, *Waking Up, A guide to Spirituality Without Religion*, by Sam Harris, and find myself compelled to comment. Before beginning, I want to state that I am a fan of Sam Harris and highly recommend this book to all freethinkers as an excellent, insightful, and extremely informative book. The book is dedicated to Harris's lifelong quest to discover the limits and potential of the human mind and his own personal life experiences. It is a continuation of the final chapter of his 2004 bestseller, *The End of Faith*, a discussion of meditation, so it is important to back up and review that chapter and some of the controversy it stirred up within the atheist community.



Here are some excerpts from that concluding chapter:

- "Most techniques of introspection that aim at uncovering the intrinsic properties of consciousness are referred to as methods of meditation."
- "Meditation, in the sense that I use it here refers to any means whereby our sense of self, of subject, object dualism in perception and cognition can be made to vanish while consciousness remains vividly aware of the continuum of experience."
- "The mystic has recognized something about the nature of consciousness prior to thought and this recognition is susceptible to rational discussion."
- "Mysticism is a rational enterprise, religion is not. The mystic has reasons for what he believes and these reasons are empirical."



**Sam Harris's latest book,  
*Waking Up: A Guide to  
Spirituality Without Religion*  
(2004)**

In the release of *The End of Faith* in paperback and audio CD, Harris responded to feedback he received from the atheist community, expressing confusion as to why his fellow atheists reacted negatively to his views on meditation. "The *End of Faith* is not a truly atheistic book," Harris wrote, "it is really a stalking horse for Buddhism, new age mysticism or some other form of irrationality. As almost every page of my book is dedicated to exposing the problems of religious faith, it is ironic that some of the harshest criticism has come from atheists who feel I have betrayed their cause on peripheral issues. If there is a book that takes a harder swing at religion, I'm not aware of it...Nevertheless, atheists have found much to complain about in the book, especially in the last chapter where I attempt to put meditation and spirituality on a rational footing. I have also taken considerable heat from atheists for a few remarks I made about the nature of consciousness. Most atheists appear to be certain that consciousness is entirely dependent on and reducible to the working of the brain. In the last chapter of the book, I briefly argue that this certainty is unwarranted. The fact is that scientists still do not know what the relationship between consciousness and matter actually is."

I want to remind you that we atheists love Sam Harris. He is one of "The Four Horsemen of the New Atheism" which includes Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens. Atheists, being rational critical thinkers, are not going to blindly follow any person without first analyzing the merits of his or her claims, even if we do revere that person. "Atheists question everything." I also want to make it clear that I acknowledge that meditation can be therapeutic.

**Left to right, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, the "Four Horsemen" further arousing the ire of fundamentalist theists by having a friendly chat in 2009.**



In *Waking Up*, Harris describes how at age 16 he was sent on a 23-day wilderness program in the Colorado Rockies in a ritual known as the "solo," consisting of three days of fasting and contemplation. Harris admits that this experience was unpleasant and that he was surprised when older members of the party described their experiences in positive and transformational terms. Harris could not understand how their happiness could increase when all the material sources of pleasure and distraction had been removed. Obviously a seed of thought was planted in his young mind. A few months before his twentieth birthday, Harris and a close friend experimented with the drug ecstasy, aka MDMA. Harris noted that under the influence of MDMA, his sense of the human mind's potential shifted profoundly. He claimed he was not overwhelmed yet felt a strong feeling of love and that the experience seemed to restructure his mind. As a neuroscientist, Harris should know that strong emotions, good or bad, imprint new neural pathways within the minds of those who experience them, which can lead to changes in thoughts and behavior. Love is one of those life changing emotions that most of us experience throughout our lives, which reminds me of one of my atheist jokes: When a religious person tells me that God is love, I simply remind them that love is blind. Therefore, if God is love and love is blind, then Ray Charles must be God. Sadly, God is dead. Another humorous note: *Waking Up* should also be considered for entry in *The Guinness Book of World Records* for the most usage of variations of the word transcendent in a sentence. In *The End of Faith*, Harris writes, "A vast literature on meditation suggests that negative social emotions, such as hatred, envy and spite both proceed from and ramify our dualistic perception of the world. Scientists are making their first attempts to test claims of this sort, but every experienced meditator has tested them already." As a scientist, Sam Harris should know that this is not how science is accomplished. As Dr. Michael Shermer might respond, "We have no way of knowing if these armatures are controlled for intervening variables and experimenter bias. ...Psychologists dismiss anecdotal accounts of this sense to a reverse self-fulfilling effect" (from *The Believing Brain*, p. 147).

Sam Harris is a brilliant man with uncanny insight and knowledge. Ironically, he uses the optic blind spot as an example of how we all have the ability to alter our states of consciousness.

"As I discuss in the final chapter of [*The End of Faith*], one of these insights is that the feeling we call I, the sense that we are the thinkers of our thoughts, the experiencer of our experiences can disappear when looked for in a rigorous way. This is not a proposition to be accepted on faith. It is an empirical observation analogous to the discovery of one's optic blind spot. Most people never notice their blind spots, caused by the transit of the optic nerve through the retina of each eye, but they can be pointed out to almost anyone with some effort."

If Harris is so brilliant, then how can he not see what the average atheist clearly sees? In chapter 12 of *The Believing Brain*, "Confirmations of Belief," Michael Shermer explains, "the bias blind spot is really a meta bias in that it is grounded in all the other cognitive biases. It is the tendency to recognize the power of cognitive biases in other people, but to be blind to their influence upon our own beliefs." I think that Harris is so wrapped up in his belief of transcendent enlightenment that he has become blind to his own bias. Shermer calls this the "Self-Justification Bias," explaining that "smart people believe weird things because they are better at rationalizing their beliefs that they hold for non-smart reasons." As another example, Shermer quotes Leo Tolstoy, one of the deepest thinkers on the human condition in the history of literature, on the power of deeply held and complexly entwined beliefs. "I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusion which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread into the fabric of their lives" (*ibid*, p. 256).

*Waking Up* reveals much about Eastern Religions and mysticism. The mystics, yogis and gurus use the same brainwashing techniques as do all the world's religions and cults: fasting, sleep deprivation, monotonous repetition, physical and emotional hardships. The book also reveals that the so-called "enlightened ones" are just as likely to be superstitious and dysfunctional as the average person. Harris acknowledges and recognizes many of the shortcomings of Eastern religions and mysticism, writing, "We can also grant that Eastern wisdom has not produced societies or political institutions that are any better than their Western counterparts. In fact one could argue that India has survived as the world's largest democracy only because of institutions that were built under British rule. Nor has the East led the world in scientific discovery. Never the less, there is something to the notion of a uniquely Eastern wisdom and most of it has been concentrated in or derived from the tradition of Buddhism." Despite this, Harris concludes, "Several Eastern traditions are exceptionally empirical and exceptionally wise and therefore merit the exceptionalism claim by their adherence."



**The Beatles and lovers seeking enlightenment from the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in India in 1968. They didn't quite find it, but wrote a lot of great songs in the meantime.**

The reason there has not been any rise of innovation or scientific discoveries from mystics is that their wisdom is limited to their level of education, knowledge, and to what they can imagine within their own minds. One cannot import external knowledge or wisdom through meditation. True transcendent enlightenment is understanding that enlightenment is an illusion of the mind. Decades of meditation will not make you one with the universe, it can only make you one with yourself. Sam writes:

"Unlike the doctrines of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the teachings of Buddhism are not considered by their adherence to be the product of infallible revelation. They are rather empirical instructions. If you do X, you will experience Y." In Shermer's *The Believing Brain*, Chapter 5, "Agenticity," he describes just how altered states of consciousness can be induced under extreme stress or conditions, "As an example of the latter, there is a phenomenon well known among mountain climbers, polar explorers, isolated sailors and endurance athletes called 'third-man factor,' but what I call the sensed-presence effect. The sensed presence is sometimes described as a "guardian angel" that appears in extreme and unusual environments. Particularly in life-and-death struggles for survival in these exceptionally harsh climates, or under unusual strain or stress, the brain apparently conjures up help for physical guidance or moral support" (pp 99-100). Shermer quotes from John Geiger's *The Third Man Factor*, "the conditions that are associated with the generation of a sensed presence: monotony, darkness, barren landscapes, isolation, cold, injury, dehydration, hunger, fatigue, and fear. To the list we can add sleep deprivation, which probably accounts for Charles Lindbergh's sensed presence during his transatlantic flight to Paris."

Shermer further describes what is going on in the brain is a merging of consciousness and subconsciousness under the above conditions. Through their various techniques, mystics self-induce altered states of consciousness that are often interpreted as spiritual enlightenment.

We could also say that if you take drug X, you will experience Y. Meditation, like a drug, is an escape from reality and like a drug can become addictive. Just say no to meditation. A born-again Christian

might say they have a personal relationship with Jesus. An experienced mystic meditator might say they have a personal relationship with their own consciousness. There is not a lot of difference between the two. Certainly experienced meditators, who self-induce altered states of consciousness can become obsessed and addicted to the side-effect of these altered states. Harris asserts that the mind has unlimited potential. I agree that the mind has an unlimited potential for self-deception.

And now a final note on consciousness from neuroscientist Vilayanur Ramachandran who described consciousness this way, "At any given moment in our waking lives, our brains are flooded with information pouring in from various senses, all of which has to be fitted coherently into a perspective that's based on what our stored memories (knowledge and beliefs) already tell us is true about the world. In order to act, the brain must have some way of selecting from this superabundance of detail and ordering it into a consistent "belief system," a story that makes sense of the available evidence." (*Discover Magazine*, May 1997, "The Brain That Misplaced its Body")

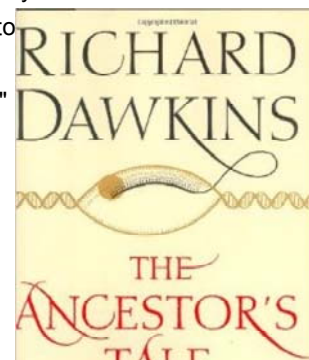


## Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville

- **When:** 2:00 - 3:30 p.m., the first Sunday of each month.
- **Where:** Books-A-Million, 9400 Atlantic Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32225.
- **What:** Books planned for discussion:
  - December 7, 2014 - *The Ancestor's Tale*, by Richard Dawkins
  - January 4, 2015 - *A Man without a Country*, by Kurt Vonnegut

The title derives from an allusion to Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, where the characters tell tales on their way backward to ancient Canterbury picking up pilgrims along with way at various rendezvous points. Dawkins *Canterbury* represents the origin of life, the oldest ancestor to our unbroken heritage. The pilgrims in Dawkins story describe our cousins the chimpanzees, gorillas, primates, mammals, animals, etc. The "beginning" starts with us, the human beings, and the story goes backward in time, following the long branching tree of evolution from the outermost twig, the branches, the trunk, and finally to the root of all life.

Dawkins has a very good reason for describing the evolutionary path backwards rather than forward. Many laymen evolutionists (and religionists)



have incorrectly concluded that evolution progresses linearly and has a purpose where we humans act as the target for a "higher" form of evolution. If one looks at evolution in the direction of forward time, it can lead one to this false sense of progress. Because of Dawkins disavowal of aimed evolution, he chose to do history backwards to avoid this misconception. And it works. Looking at evolution backwards gives us a novel and new appreciation for the diverse and branching aspect of evolution. At each branch point (rendezvous point) we meet our ancestors (Dawkins invents the term concestors). The first rendezvous point, for example, examines our first cousins the chimpanzees, our closest relatives on the DNA chain. This backward way of looking at evolution shows us that humans did not evolve from chimpanzees but rather we evolved out of a shared concestor which gave rise to chimps and humans. A major rendezvous occurs with rendezvous 26 (about 590 million years ago), when all the insects, molluscs, and the worms join. Then we go on to meet the fungi, the plants and eventually the bacteria at some indeterminate time in the ancient past, where all life shares the same ancestor. It takes only 40 rendezvous points to travel back to the beginning of life on earth itself. This appears breathtaking when one considers that all living things trace their lineage back to a single ancestor, a bacterium that lived more than three billion years ago. All life as we know it consists of DNA and all living things, including bacteria, share common genes.



Dawkins describes the latest cutting edge ideas of evolution that includes theories about the emergence of bipedalism, the wrongheaded idea of primitiveness, and evolutionary measurement clocks (tree rings, radioactive dating, DNA code comparisons, and Bayesian analysis, etc.). We learn about ring species (that blows the creationist "no evidence of transitional specie" falsehood out of the water), hox genes, and junk DNA.

As we can expect, Dawkins argues against the creationists and presents a compelling case against the supernatural explanation for life. Dawkins really shines when he exposes a falsehood which he describes as "The tyranny of the discontinuous mind," whereby certain people think in absolutist terms trying to fit unclassifiable things into classifications (and thus producing reification fallacies). Dawkins realizes the importance of exposing these falsehoods because they form the major reason for the misunderstanding of evolution.

Lots of names will seem strange for those not familiar with biological labeling (Ergasts, Xenarthrans, Tetraconata, Amoebozoa, Ecdysozoa, Oomycota, Neomeniomorpha, for example) but this only adds to the mystery of diversity of life. This ambitious book gets complicated in parts (for us laymen) and even though it has over 600 pages, the travel has it rewards. It will reveal, like no other book on evolution, the complexity, diversity, and wonderment of life on earth.

**Link to Book Review:** <http://www.nobeliefs.com/dawkins3.htm>

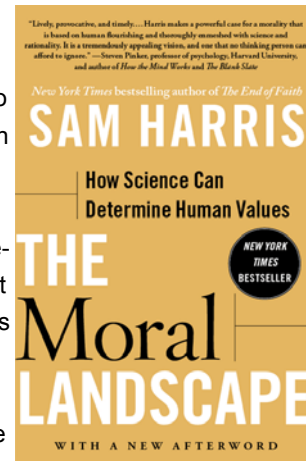
**For More Info:** Contact Herb Gerson at [12herbert30gerson@bellsouth.net](mailto:12herbert30gerson@bellsouth.net), or call 904-363-6446.

## Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine

- **When:** 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., the second Thursday of each month.

- **Where:** Clubhouse at a private condominium in St. Augustine (Anastasia Island).
- **What:** Book planned for discussion:
  - December 11, 2014 - *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, by Sam Harris
  - January 8, 2015 -- to be announced

In this explosive new book, Sam Harris tears down the wall between scientific facts and human values, arguing that most people are simply mistaken about the relationship between morality and the rest of human knowledge. Harris urges us to think about morality in terms of human and animal well-being, viewing the experiences of conscious creatures as peaks and valleys on a “moral landscape.” Because there are definite facts to be known about where we fall on this landscape, Harris foresees a time when science will no longer limit itself to merely describing what people do in the name of “morality”; in principle, science should be able to tell us what we ought to do to live the best lives possible. Bringing a fresh perspective to age-old questions of right and wrong, and good and evil, Harris demonstrates that we already know enough about the human brain and its relationship to events in the world to say that there are right and wrong answers to the most pressing questions of human life. Because such answers exist, moral relativism is simply false—and comes at increasing cost to humanity. And the intrusions of religion into the sphere of human values can be finally repelled: for just as there is no such thing as Christian physics or Muslim algebra, there can be no Christian or Muslim morality.



Using his expertise in philosophy and neuroscience, along with his experience on the front lines of our “culture wars,” Harris delivers a game-changing book about the future of science and about the real basis of human cooperation.

**Link to Book Review:** <http://www.samharris.org/the-moral-landscape>

**More Info:** Contact Bill Stroop at [bill@strooplaw.com](mailto:bill@strooplaw.com) for address, directions, and gate code.

**NOTE TO ALL!** Books may be found in the library, purchased from local book stores or 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.



# NPR Corporate Sponsorship Update

## Carrie Renwick, Fundraising Chair

The First Coast Freethought Society annual fundraising campaign to keep our National Public Radio (NPR) announcements about the FCFS and our monthly meetings on radio station WJCT, 89.9 FM, has closed. However, for your convenience, this information listing the different ways to donate will appear in each newsletter.

## Thank you!

Many thanks on behalf of the First Coast Freethought Society to everyone who has contributed this year. Please keep our NPR corporate sponsorship goals in mind throughout the whole year. Heartfelt thanks to those of you who plan to contribute in the coming months. Our plan is to continue with the same number of NPR announcements we are contracted for now, in hopes that membership renewals will be helping soon, and in hopes that folks will continue to contribute throughout the year.

## To Donate on a Monthly Basis

You can now set up automatic monthly donations which you may find very convenient and easy on the budget. You can do this in two different ways.

1. Go to the FCFS website home page, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find a PayPal button to make an automatic monthly donation to our NPR fund. Automatic monthly donations via PayPal require you to have a PayPal account.
2. Set it up through your online banking system.

## To Donate on a One-Time Basis

Should you prefer to donate on a one-time basis, here are the ways.

1. Visit the website, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find the opportunity to contribute on our homepage. You can pay via PayPal or with any major credit card (via PayPal);
2. Mail a check payable to the FCFS to P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255;
3. Bring your contribution to a meeting or another FCFS event and give it to a board member.

Whichever method you select, you will receive a letter from the treasurer, suitable for your IRS records, acknowledging your tax-deductible contribution.

We will not pester you with fundraising requests until next summer, but please keep in mind that our NPR announcements on the air may well be the most significant project the FCFS undertakes for the community and for the cause of the freethought movement. Please support the cause when you can. Thank you for your support!



# About our newsletter, the *First Coast FreeThinker*

## Information for Readers

The First Coast FreeThinker is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers and members 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. Members are entitled to receive hard-copy should they prefer. The e-mail version is encouraged, as the newsletter is optimized for on-screen reading.

Readers are invited and encouraged to share 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 should be submitted to [Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org). Contributors who cannot submit manuscripts electronically may send them to Fred Hill, Editor, 1817 Egner St., Jacksonville, FL 32206.

The deadline for time-sensitive material is the THIRD SATURDAY of each month for the following month's issue, but submissions are welcome anytime.

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.

Subject matter must tie in with [freethought](#) or with the [Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles](#) (found on our website). All accepted submissions are subject to editorial modification. Our style guide is *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Printed manuscript submissions cannot be returned. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.

# Wilhelmina M. Walton (1932- 2014)

## Carrie Renwick

Wilhelmina (Willa) Marie Walton, age 82, passed away on October 20, 2014 after a long battle with Alzheimer's. She was born in Crescent City, FL and moved to Jacksonville where she was a resident for many years. Wilhelmina is survived by three of her four children and their families, her former husband, a brother, and four sisters.



She was beloved by many, including the wonderful staff of Wyndham Lakes and Community Hospice of Northeast Florida.

Wilhelmina loved reading, cooking, traveling, dancing, and the study of science and medicine. She was a Master Gardner, Licensed Massage Therapist, and Certified Medical Transcriptionist. She took an active part in the Greater Jacksonville Chapter of the American Association for Medical Transcription, having served as president for several terms. She was an active member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, having led a Sunday morning discussion group titled, "Playing With Ideas," for many years, among other supportive activities.



Wilhelmina is remembered by the First Coast Freethought Society for her boundless energy and tireless efforts on our behalf. She was a founding member of the FCFS and helped draft the initial bylaws. Our early planning meetings and numerous subsequent board meetings were held in her living room. She served as FCFS president for two terms and as secretary for three. Her first project was to present a science lecture series at the UUC in which videotapes were shown to the public. When members lamented inadequate socialization opportunity at monthly meetings, Willa instigated our monthly socials at a local restaurant, an activity which continues to this day. She hosted many "Spring Flings" and "Fall Frolics" at her beautiful home on Potts Creek and hosted some Dinners for Doubters, as well.



**Wilhelmina, when she very appropriately was honored with the 2009 Freethinker of the Year award, a statue of Rodin's *The Thinker*.**

Willa single-handedly negotiated placement of five-year subscriptions of *Free Inquiry* magazine in each of the Jacksonville Public Libraries. She frequently traveled to humanist, atheist, and freethought conventions, and she attended area lectures, conscientiously representing the FCFS wherever she went, networking, and identifying future FCFS speakers. In 2006, Willa conceived our most ambitious project ever, *Science Under Siege*. This was a panel discussion co-sponsored by UNF, stressing to the public the importance of teaching evolution in Jacksonville Public Schools. She worked tirelessly to insure its outstanding success. Willa organized tabling sessions at Wage Peace events, the Earth Day Fair, UNF's Peace Awareness Week, and Religious Awareness Week.

I am very fortunate that Wilhelmina was my closest and best friend for almost 30 years. There never was, and never will be, another friend as true and wonderful as my "Little Buddy."

A Celebration of Life will take place in the spring, probably at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, and will be publicized widely. To view the obituary appearing in the *Times-Union*, see: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/timesunion/obituary.aspx?n=wilhelmina-marie-walton&pid=172935800#sthash.J0TIRRM.C.dpuf>

# About the First Coast Freethought Society



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591

Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591

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 Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244. (Driveway located on Collins Rd., 400 ft. east of Roosevelt Blvd.)

Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public.

## Other Activities

In addition to regular monthly meetings, we offer:

- two monthly humanist book discussion groups, one in Jacksonville and one in St. Augustine, (current books are listed in each newsletter, or for further details visit: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/bdg>);
- a monthly social and dinner at the Olive Garden (see details in each newsletter);
- coffee and conversation in the fresh air on a monthly basis at Secular Sunday in the Park. We meet the fourth Sunday of each month, 10:00 a.m. to noon, at Losco Regional Park, 10851 Hood Road South, Jax 32257. (see Activities section of the FCFS home page: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/>);
- Dinners for Doubtters (when scheduled);
- volunteer opportunity on a monthly basis, currently at Dignity U Wear (visit: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/component/content/article/50/150>); and
- a freethought Yahoo! Group (to subscribe, send a blank message to: [jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahogroups.com)).

For information on all these activities, please visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, or see the calendar of events at the end of each newsletter and on the website. You need not be a member to attend these activities!

## FCFS 2014 Board Members

President - Earl Coggins: 904-521-5039  
 Vice President - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826  
 Interim Secretary - Celia Abbruzzese: 904-419-8826  
 Treasurer - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390  
 At-Large - Herb Gerson: 904-363-6446  
 At-Large - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610  
 At Large - Richard Keene: 904-386-1121

## Other Appointments

Parliamentarian - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896  
 E-mail Secretary - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

## Committees and Chairs

Editorial - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610  
 Community Outreach - Celia Abbruzzese: 904-982-8431  
 Finance - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390  
 Fundraising - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826  
 Membership - Judy Hankins: 904-724-8188  
 Publicity - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826  
 Website - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896

All FCFS personnel may be reached via e-mail at  
[info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org)

# December Meeting - Human Light Celebration

## Carrie Renwick, Program Chair

On Monday, December 15, we will be holding our Eleventh Annual Human Light Celebration 6:30 to 9:00 p.m., at the Bella Vita Italian Restaurant. We will enjoy a brief social hour starting at 6:30 p.m. and dine at 7 p.m., ordering from a party menu. Ceremonies to follow. Bella Vita is located at 3825 Baymeadows Road, Jacksonville, FL 32217.

## Bequests

*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 can provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes. Or, just talk to your attorney. Our EIN is 20-1462737.

For further information, contact  
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or  
904-419-8826 • [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) • <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

## Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason

- First Coast Freethought Society: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>
- Jacksonville Atheist, Agnostic, Secular Meetup Group (JAM): <http://jaxatheists.com>
- Secular Saint Augustine (SSA): <http://meetup.com/Secular-Saint-Augustine>

The FCFS is a proud member of the [Florida Humanist Association](#) (formerly the Humanists of Florida Association).

## Freethought Events on the First Coast

- Monday, November 10 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Saturday, November 15 - Volunteer at Dignity U Wear, Jacksonville - 9:00 a.m.
- Monday, November 17- FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jacksonville ("Waiting for a Donut" -- a One-Act Play), 6:30 p.m.
- Friday, November 21 - [Secular St. Augustine Meetup](#) - St. Augustine, 7:00 p.m. (Meetups are generally the third Friday, but you need to visit website to RSVP and for meeting details.)
- Saturday, November 22 - FCFS December Newsletter Deadline
- Sunday, November 23 - FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville, 10:00 a.m.
- Tuesday, November 25 - FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville, 6:00 p.m.
- Sunday, December 7 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville, 2:00 p.m.
- Monday, December 8 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)

- Thursday, December 11 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine, Anastasia Island, 7:00 p.m.
- Monday, December 15 - FCFS Annual Human Light Celebration at Bella Vita Restaurant - 6:30 p.m.

## Directions to Monthly Meeting

Our monthly meetings are held at the **Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church (BBUUC)**, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244. The address is Manresa, but the main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd..

- From I-295, take the Roosevelt exit. Go north on Roosevelt Blvd. to the first traffic light which is Collins Rd. Turn right onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd., on the right.
- Going south on Roosevelt, look for Atlantic Self-Storage on the left. This is the Collins Rd. intersection. Turn left onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is on Collins Rd., on the right. (If you come to I-295, you've gone too far, turn around, and you will turn right onto Collins Rd.)

MAP ON FCFS WEBSITE

See accurate map at this link: [http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/lib/fcfs\\_bbuuc\\_map.gif](http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/lib/fcfs_bbuuc_map.gif) (Please note, Google Maps, as well as other maps, may not be consistent with the actual street signs.)

## Membership Application



Use this PDF form

or join on our [website](#).

*Copyright © 2014 First Coast Freethought Society, Inc., All rights reserved.*

[unsubscribe from this list](#)