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**May 2015**

**Volume 14, Issue 5**

## Table of Contents

- [May 2015 Meeting](#)
- [President's Message - May 2015 - Rare Earth Elements](#)
- [Invocations & Gods in Ancient and a Modern Greece](#)
- [May 26, 2015 Olive Garden Social](#)
- [Wilhelmina Walton Celebration of Life!](#)
- [Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville](#)
- [Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine](#)
- [And Now, to our Off-Shore Correspondent in Thailand...](#)
- [NPR Corporate Sponsorship](#)
- [Christian Invocations at Jacksonville City Council Meetings](#)
- [About our newsletter, the First Coast FreeThinker](#)
- [Volunteer Opportunity - Dignity U Wear](#)
- [About the First Coast Freethought Society](#)
- [June 15, 2015 Meeting](#)
- [Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason](#)
- [Freethought Events on the First Coast](#)
- [Directions to Monthly Meeting at BBUUC](#)
- [Membership Application](#)

## May 2015 Meeting

- **What:** FCFS Monthly Meeting
- **Who:** Douglas R. Doan, former Methodist minister
- **Title:** "A Road No Longer Winding"
- **When:** Monday, May 18, 2015, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:00)

- **Where:** Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244 (From the I-295 Roosevelt exit, go north to the first traffic light, Collins Rd. Turn right on Collins. Go 400 ft. The church driveway will be on your right.)

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

## Meeting Description

At our May monthly meeting, you will hear the story of Doug Doan's journey from committed Christian, to Pastor, to Christian counselor, to agnostic. He had a deeply religious heritage and spent many years in Christian College and Seminary, followed by many years in various ministries. (For the details of his religious life, click [here](#) to see his article, "My Christian Pedigree" in the April 2015 *FreeThinker*.)

Several years ago, he had a crisis of faith that led him to search and explore the things of faith much more deeply than he had before. His story is interesting, personal, humorous, and candid. Don't miss it!



## Meet the Speaker

Doug Doan comes to us with a unique religious background, having been to Bible College and Seminary, and having been both a Pastor and a Christian counselor. After a "long and winding road" he is now a confirmed agnostic. He is currently writing a book about his experience. He likes to learn and write and in his spare time he plays Facebook games, but would rather be playing drums! He has three young adult children and currently works in hotel management.

## President's Message - May 2015 - Rare Earth Elements

### Earl Coggins

Back in the early '70s one of my favorite bands was Rare Earth. I loved that band. Still do. Their song, "Hey Big Brother," still resonates with me 40 years later. The lyrics to that song ("Hey big brother, as soon as you arrive, you better get in touch with the people big brother, and get them on your side big brother, and keep them satisfied.") had a profound effect on me, and I credit them with instilling in my psyche a keen interest in the whole "we the people" concept of a free society. They had a sound unlike anything playing on the radio back then. They were indeed rare. Later in life I found out there is a list of elements in the periodic table called rare earth elements



(REE). The elements on that list are hard to find on earth, hence the word "rare."



I bring up the word "rare" because it has a relationship with a lot of grass-roots activist organizations, and the First Coast Freethought Society is no exception.

The relationship I am referring to is the rarity of willing volunteers. You know what I am talking about—people who volunteer to do stuff. They are the life-preserving rare earth element that keeps organizations like the First Coast Freethought Society alive. Volunteers write letters to newspaper editors, city council members, even the mayor and sometimes the governor. They go to board meetings. They spend their own money on causes their group is supporting. They are not afraid to roll up their sleeves and do something, but they're getting harder and harder to find. Who would blame them for spending their time at home? Watching a movie and drinking a glass of scotch or wine is much more fun than attending meetings and battling religious conservatives when you are out-numbered 20-to-1 every time you venture out into the street to try your hand at standing up for something you believe in.

Volunteers are rare because spare time is rare for many people. People who work 40 to 50 hours a week have only a few hours of spare time each weekday, which means most working-class people's personal lives revolve around their weekends. Free time becomes not just rare, but precious, and spending precious free time on anything other than cleaning, repairing, yard work, reading, watching a good movie, shopping, paying bills, or being with family and friends is out-of-the-question for most working people. Finding that rare person who is willing to sacrifice his or her free time is like winning the lottery for grass roots organizations.

It should be a no-brainer to hold onto life-preserving rare earth elements, especially in local activist organizations that rarely have but a few working volunteers. When you find someone who is holding down a full-time job, yet wants to volunteer for your organization, spend her own money for your organization, knock on stranger's doors for your organization, you have found a rare earth element. Volunteers are worth making sacrifices and compromises for, in order to hold onto them. They may not be perfect, I know I'm not, but volunteers show up, ready to work.

The number of volunteers determines the impact an organization such as ours ultimately has on its community. Without these volunteers putting together a sustained effort to promote an organization, that organization can fade away fast.



**Results of FCFS volunteers: a panel discussion at UNF, April 14, 2015 titled, "Freedom of Speech: The Linchpin of a Free Society"**

I recently had the pleasure of working on a project with some members of the First Coast Freethought Society, a panel event project, "Freedom of Speech: The Linchpin of a Free Society," with a merry band (committee) of dedicated volunteers. It was hard work putting together the event, what with trying to find six panel members and a moderator who were all both excellent at what they do and all available on the same evening to donate four hours of their time to this event.

Working with a group of people can be difficult. Disagreements crop up, obstacles get in the way of progress, time becomes a factor as the event date gets closer and closer, and each committee member has to make sacrifices in his or her own personal schedule in order to attend meetings.

Looking back, I have to say it was stressful trying to put together an event of this magnitude in such a short amount of time, but we did it, and I'd do it again in a heartbeat because not only was the work exhilarating, the people were fun to be around. I want to thank these rare earth elements, the volunteers I had the pleasure of working with in order to create something worthwhile. Thank you David Schwambaird, Liz DuClose, Carrie and Mark Renwick, John Ruskuski, Fred Hill, Judy and Herb Gerson. The event was a success because of your efforts.

If you're reading this and feel stimulated to donate some of your time and energy to the First Coast Freethought Society, get in touch with one of the members of our Board of Directors and find out how you can help make the First Coast Freethought Society an even greater organization.

## Invocations & Gods in Ancient and a Modern Greece

### Fred W. Hill

Ancient Greece of the period from about the 6th through 4th centuries BCE has been touted as the "cradle of western civilization" due to the flourishing of poetry, plays, sculpture, architecture, philosophy, mathematics, the earliest approaches to scientific investigation, and a little thing called democracy. Granted, democracy wasn't practiced throughout the Greek world, and where it was practiced, it was eventually engulfed by neighboring empires. Even while it lasted, it was limited to the free adult male citizens of the various city-states—only about ten to twenty percent of the population, in a culture wherein slavery remained endemic—and most slaves were other white Europeans, captured in war or descended from captives. And it was still taboo to openly question the existence of the old gods, even a capital crime, particularly if you happened to offend a majority of citizens who might vote for you to go into exile or drink a cup of hemlock as in the case of Socrates. The Greeks weren't too concerned if playwrights or poets made the gods appear petty, lascivious, or even stupid, but they still had to be acknowledged. Popular consensus held that the gods could take some mocking, but they could not take anyone not believing in their existence. If Zeus was too busy to throw a thunderbolt at the impious, the people would act on his behalf, voting to determine the proper punishment. Pure democracies, let us note, can be just as tyrannical as absolute monarchies – a majority



of citizens, after all, can be as unfair, unjust, and pitiless as any lone despot.

In founding the United States, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and other key leaders took some inspiration from the ancient Greek democracy, for good and ill, but took deeper draughts from key figures of the Roman republic, such as Cincinnatus, Cicero, and Cato; and even more from enlightenment philosophers, such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Montesquieu. Many of our founding fathers did retain the ancient vice of slavery. Although at least a few were aware enough to recognize their own hypocrisy of crying for freedom while holding others in unjustified bondage, they were for the most part unwilling to do much about it. And voting rights were still very limited—predominantly to property owning white men over the age of 21, a condition that would only be changed in increments and after much protest by the disenfranchised over the next two centuries. But for all their all too human failings, and the compromises made to reach any consensus at all, the founders established a system of government meant to be dominated by the rule of law rather than individual whim and in which all the people would, at least theoretically, have equal rights and protection under that law, whether they were part of a minority or a majority. Due to all too common biases and prejudices of even the wisest men among legislators, as well as voters, the reality remains too distant from the ideal, despite significant progress within the last 50 years.

Still, among the founders' crowning achievements was inserting into both the primary constitution itself and in the first amendment to that document that forms the basis of our federal law, language that specifically prohibits any religious test for public office and bars any law respecting establishment of a religion or impeding the free exercise of religion. As the federal Constitution is the supreme law of the land, superseding any contrary subordinate laws, including those states and local communities, no one can be legally barred from public office due to their religious beliefs or lack thereof and the government cannot endorse any particular religious belief. A glance at our currency, emblazoned with the meaningless slogan "In God We Trust", is evidence of how imperfectly our Constitution is enforced, but by the usual fits, starts, and occasional backsliding, progress is made.



**Socrates drinks the fatal hemlock after being convicted of impious acts, including failing to acknowledge the city's gods, and refusing to go into exile.**

One of those fits occurred in the town of Greece, New York, established in 1822 and named for the then newly founded modern nation of Greece, a predominantly Orthodox Christian country struggling for independence from the Islamic Ottoman Empire. The Christian majority of 21st century Greece, NY, felt entirely justified in having town meetings begin with an invocation—a form of public request for a blessing or guidance, usually from a supernatural power, and in this case nearly always beseeching Jesus, but occasionally allowing a Jew to invoke favor from their version of God. They might have allowed invocations by a Muslim or even a Hindu who each at least were begging favors from some sort of deity. Reflecting the dominant local superstitions, at least 90 percent of the time they'd be asking Jesus, who they believe to be his own father, son and ghost all at once, to provide them with enough sense to do the

right thing while governing their town. Jesus apparently told them to ignore the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which is what they wanted to do anyhow.

Susan Galloway and Linda Stephens, two atheists in Greece, however, apparently didn't appreciate being forced to sit through prayers every time they attended a town meeting, and filed a suit against Greece that eventually wound up in the U.S. Supreme Court, which in its all too human wisdom in a five to four vote decided in favor of Greece (*Town of Greece v. Galloway*, 2014). Five of the six Catholic Justices of the Court saw no undue, unconstitutional coercion in having non-Christians sit through prayers, perhaps even prayers that suggested they would all go to Hell for not believing in the god of the Christian majority, at civic events. The majority was just thoughtful enough to allow that the town could not exclude or reject petitions for secular invocations, defined by the Humanist Society as a "solemnizing an event with an appeal to the audiences shared human values for assistance and authority in their public discourse." And so last year, Dan Courtney, an atheist, gave the first such invocation at a town meeting in Greece and this year Ms. Stephens and another local secular group leader, Paul Grim, are scheduled to deliver invocations.

**Dan Courtney, despite not believing in the old god of his community or any other deity, is not forced to leave town or drink hemlock and instead delivers a secular invocation at a town meeting in Greece, New York, in 2014.**



Let's admit this is making the best of a bad situation, as I'm sure most secularists would prefer there be no invocation at all, after all, as Associate Justice Elena Kagan, who happens to be Jewish, put in her dissent to the majority decision, "When a person goes to court, a polling place, or an immigration proceeding—could go on: to a zoning agency, a parole board hearing, or the DMV—government officials do not engage in sectarian worship, nor do they ask her to do likewise. They all participate in the business of government not as Christians, Jews, Muslims (and more), but only as Americans — none of them different from any other for that civic purpose. Why not, then, at a town meeting?" Jennifer LeClaire, editor of a Christian blog site and author of *The Spiritual Warrior's Guide to Defeating Jezebel*, called the situation ironic in that the Town of Greece won the lawsuit but had to allow the secular invocations, she expressed hope that the heathens "will meet with some on-fire Christians who can show them Jesus." (<http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/44658-did-supreme-court-prayer-win-backfire-on-christians>, for those curious enough to want to check her out for yourselves.) On the other hand, perhaps some civil-minded atheists can pour some cold water of reason on those Christians and make them realize that they are all fired up over nothing. Ok, that's almost as fantastical as a man fathering himself for the purpose of sacrificing himself to himself for the sins of everyone he created, but not nearly as silly. Moreover, in taking up more speaking roles in this particular political theater, atheists are letting themselves be heard and seen to a greater extent than previously possible, forcing theists to realize there are more unbelievers in their midst than they might have previously guessed, that most of us are good neighbors, honest industrious people rather than wild-eyed radicals hell bent on tearing society down.

Perhaps they'll even figure out on their own that it's not only ok to mock God, but also that the real reason God never personally takes down any heathens is that there is no God at all.

## May 26, 2015 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, **MAY 26**, 2015, 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!

## Wilhelmina Walton Celebration of Life! Carrie Renwick

As you may know, Wilhelmina Marie Walton passed away in October 2014. Everyone is invited to attend a Celebration of Life for this founding member and devoted friend of the First Coast Freethought Society. Many people have commented that the FCFS wouldn't be what it is today, if not for her. To view the obituary in the *Florida Times-Union*, click here:

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/timesunion/obituary.aspx?n=wilhelmina-marie-walton&pid=172935800#sthash.J0TIRRM.C.dpuf>

- **What:** Celebration of Life, with a catered sit-down lunch to follow.
- **When:** Saturday, **JUNE 6, 2015, at 11:00 a.m.**
- **Where:** Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7495 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, FL 32211
- **RSVP:** Please RSVP to Willa's daughter, Lori, at [katterhenrl@mail.montclair.edu](mailto:katterhenrl@mail.montclair.edu) or call 973-618-6523, if you plan to attend the catered lunch immediately following the celebration.



Note, if you are NOT staying for lunch, no RSVP is required. But bring your memories and stories to share, whether as part of the service, or informally. To view the somewhat more detailed obituary, by me, that appeared in the November 2014 issue of the *FreeThinker*, click here:

<http://us2.campaign-archive1.com/?u=60a4ff5743d8fe1ceb691b694&id=79f965c274&e=c5edbf927f#mctoc11>



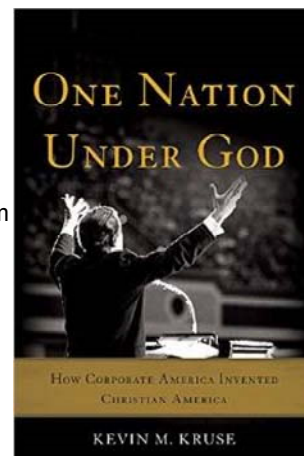
## Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville

- **When:** 3:00 - 4:30 p.m., the first Sunday of each month.
- **Where:** Books-A-Million, 9400 Atlantic Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32225.
- **What:** Books planned for discussion:
  - June 7, 2015 - *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* by Kevin M. Kruse
  - July 5, 2015 - *Forbidden Fruit* by Paul Kurtz

We're often told that the United States is, was, and always has been a Christian nation. But in *One Nation Under God*, historian Kevin M. Kruse reveals that the idea of "Christian America" is an invention—and a relatively recent one at that.

As Kruse argues, the belief that America is fundamentally and formally a Christian nation originated in the 1930s when businessmen enlisted religious activists in their fight against FDR's New Deal. Corporations from General Motors to Hilton Hotels bankrolled conservative clergymen, encouraging them to attack the New Deal as a program of "pagan statism" that perverted the central principle of Christianity: the sanctity and salvation of the individual. Their campaign for "freedom under God" culminated in the election of their close ally Dwight Eisenhower in 1952.

But this apparent triumph had an ironic twist. In Eisenhower's hands, a religious movement born in opposition to the government was transformed into one that fused faith and the federal government as never before. During the 1950s, Eisenhower revolutionized the role of religion in American political culture, inventing new traditions from inaugural prayers to the National Prayer Breakfast. Meanwhile, Congress added the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance and made "In God We Trust" the country's first official motto. With private groups joining in, church membership soared to an all-time high of 69%. For the first time, Americans began to





think of their country as an officially Christian nation.

During this moment, virtually all Americans—across the religious and political spectrum—believed that their country was “one nation under God.” But as Americans moved from broad generalities to the details of issues such as school prayer, cracks began to appear. Religious leaders rejected this “lowest common denomination” public religion, leaving conservative political activists to champion it alone. In Richard Nixon’s hands, a politics that conflated piety and patriotism became sole property of the right.

Provocative and authoritative, *One Nation Under God* reveals how the unholy alliance of money, religion, and politics created a false origin story that continues to define and divide American politics to this day. (From product description, Amazon.com)

**Link to Book Review:** <http://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/one-nation>

A link to an interview with the author on NPR: <http://www.npr.org/2015/03/30/396365659/how-one-nation-didnt-become-under-god-until-the-50s-religious-revival>

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

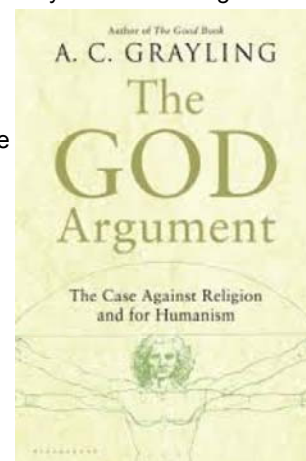
## Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine

- **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:** Books planned for discussion:
  - June 11, 2015 - *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism* by A. C. Grayling
  - July 9, 2015 - *Infidel* by Ayann Hirsi Ali

Examining all the arguments for and against religion and religious belief—across the range of reasons and motives that people have for being religious and how they stand up to scrutiny—*The God Argument* is a landmark book in the ongoing debate about the place of religion and secularism in our world.

While A. C. Grayling is a clear critic of religion as a guiding force, unlike some of religion's opponents, he carefully considers the various arguments for the existence of God and the many reasons people believe in a deity. More important, he then offers a powerful alternative to religion as a world-view—humanism—an approach to life for those who wish to live with intellectual integrity, based on reason, evidence, and a desire to do and be good, and one which does not interfere with people's rights to their own beliefs and freedom of expression.

Humanism, as Grayling reveals it, is an ethics of sympathy and tolerance based on the best endeavor to make sense of human nature and the human condition. Though humanism



recognizes why the various faiths first arose, it nevertheless argues that organized religion should no longer be given a privileged position in society.

Thoughtfully provocative, intellectually expansive, *The God Argument* makes a powerful case that secular belief, free of religious dogma, allows for a much more compassionate and caring worldview. (From Amazon.com description)

**Link to Book Review:** <http://americanhumanist.org/HNN/details/2013-09-book-review-ac-graylings-ithe-god-argument-the-case>

**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.

## And Now, to our Off-Shore Correspondent in Thailand... “Livable Societies”

### Lance Stoll

*(Sociologist Lance Stoll, long-time member and friend of the First Coast Freethought Society, is currently living and teaching in Thailand. He shares his views from afar. —Editor's Note.)*

I've had some negative experiences here in Thailand, most coming from a motorcycle accident during which I broke my nose, right ankle, and right knee. But the time I've spent here on my butt has given a great deal of time to think about the many differences between American culture and Thai culture and really the differences between a variety of cultures. In America, the necessities of life are very expensive and difficult for all to achieve. Healthcare, housing, food, and transportation in the United States are seen as luxury items and take a huge proportion of one's income. In Thailand and in most sophisticated highly-developed countries, the necessities of life that ALL citizens need are either provided to all or are affordable. In Thailand, for example, described as a “third world” country, housing, food, transportation and as you'll see, healthcare are very affordable to all. There are very few homeless or hungry in this country, while in America it's estimated that 300,000 are living on



the streets at any time (one third military veterans) and nearly 50 million have insufficient food. In fact, 25% of American children go to bed hungry every night. Healthcare in America is unaffordable, and even with the new ACA which has made healthcare possible for 16 million who could not afford it before, millions go without any healthcare at all. Housing in America takes nearly half of one's income. Here in Thailand, my rent is a bit over \$100 a month. With the average Thai monthly income around \$800, housing is a bit over 10% of monthly income. One can eat in this country very well for just a few dollars a day. Transportation here is also very inexpensive. One can go for miles and miles for under one dollar and if you can afford a car or a motorbike, gasoline is very expensive. A motorcycle, by the way, costs between \$300 used and \$1500 for new. If you explore Scandinavian countries, where the quality of life far surpasses life in America, you'll find that necessities are provided by the government or free of charge beyond taxation. Unlike Thailand, where good education is costly, the Scandinavian countries provide the highest quality education possible free of charge to their citizens. Yes, right-wingers, taxes are high in Scandinavian countries, but look at what citizens get for that money! In America, two-thirds or more of all tax money goes to support the military industrial complex, not social welfare or education programs for citizens.



Just a thought about healthcare in America, to give you a bit of perspective. Americans may not truly understand the degree to which they are being gouged and screwed by the medical industrial complex. In 2008, I tore the meniscus in my right knee playing tennis. It hurt and I went to the orthopedic surgeon who did an MRI and showed me how the meniscus was torn. I won't even get into the fact that today there is disagreement as to whether anything should be done about this, but at the time he told me I needed surgery. I had very expensive but very poor insurance, this was before Obamacare. I had to come up with \$2500 cash up front just to get into the surgery center. The insurance company paid some ridiculously small amount and I was left with about \$20,000 in cost to the surgery center and the doctor that I was still paying off monthly when I left the United States in 2014. Now, this surgery required two microscopic holes and 5 minutes in the operating room.

Three weeks ago I had a bad motorcycle accident here in Thailand. I required an ambulance (ambulance charges alone in America cost about \$2500) and emergency care at the hospital. I have had 4 different x-rays and a fiberglass cast on my leg and crutches. I had to have my nose set and stitches from a plastic surgeon. I've had three orthopedic surgeons see me and inspect my x-rays and one wrap and cast my leg. I've required pain medication and a variety of other medications. I will require 3 more weeks of care including another set of x-rays, removing my cast and braces for my ankle and knee. The cost for all of this EXCEPTIONAL care that I have received will be just around \$1,000. My motorcycle insurance has already paid me \$750 and I'm waiting for my American health insurance to pay anything. This should illustrate what an amazing scam the American health care system is. My doctors here in Thailand are not multimillionaires. They make about \$60k a year here which is a nice salary in Thailand. The hospital I went to for the majority of my care is a for-profit hospital and was about twice as much as the University hospital I go to now. I intend to retire and live in this country the rest of my life. America will not provide me with Medicare here, and it's amazing, because the cost to the government providing medical care here would be a tenth of providing it in the US. Even so, healthcare is so good and so inexpensive in this country, it illustrates how greedy capitalism has destroyed every aspect of life in America.

**Lance after the spill.  
Doing better now!**



The discussion in the US was always about how great capitalism is and how terrible socialism is. I've experienced the silliness of this argument. Thailand is a capitalistic society, Scandinavian societies are capitalistic countries. It is not about capitalism, it is about greed, bigotry, racism, selfishness, and hatred. If the people who run America do not need to provide any benefits or services to maintain their control, they won't. Since Obama has been president, the republicans have defied every action he has taken. In the 28 states they and the Koch brothers control, they have attacked unions, pensions, minimum wage laws, public schools, and healthcare. And the people accept it. The rich have gotten much more rich under Obama than they were before, as they divert benefits from the people to themselves. And the American people do nothing. As long as they can get away with such things, they will continue to divert more and more money from the people to themselves.

When I was in college, the Red Brigade was a very active group on campus. They were a Marxist group. I had many conversations and arguments with these folks. While I do think they were wrong (Thailand and Scandinavia are examples showing that capitalism isn't the entire problem), it is clear that unregulated, unbridled capitalism IS THE PROBLEM. Even Adam Smith who created capitalism understood that unbridled capitalism is nothing more than greed. Ayn Rand turned this unabated greed into an art form, almost a religion that people like Rand Paul and Paul Ryan worship. Capitalism as it exists in America with its oligopoly has eliminated the competition so crucial to Smith's capitalism and eliminated the jobs and job value that this competition created. But, I can tell you that it is not a good thing, and in the long run, the rich are better off with a healthy and happy middle class. In seeing what I've seen here in Thailand, in Scandinavia, and most of all in the United States, the guillotine used so effectively in the French revolution may be the "solution" to the greed of unregulated, unbridled capitalism. The rich and the christorepublicans who control America still have a choice, they can accept some regulation, they can pay a bit more in taxes, they can approve minimum wage increases, universal healthcare, improve PUBLIC education, and ban private prisons among other things. Are these changes likely in post Citizen's United America? Are they likely without the guillotine? My Red Brigade friends used to tell me how they would "convince" people like Donald Trump to "share". They said they'd put a gun in his mouth and tell him to share or die. I always argued against such behavior. Now, I am not sure there is any other way.



# NPR Corporate Sponsorship

## Carrie Renwick, Fundraising Chair

We would love to see NPR contributions come in throughout the year!

### To Donate on a Monthly Basis

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

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 PO 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. Thank you!

# Christian Invocations at Jacksonville City Council Meetings

## Susan Ert-Ker

Clay Yarborough will no longer be Council President on July 1st, 2015. Could we make a final showing of outrage before he leaves office?

Is there anyone who can convince the city council to change council rule 1.106 (found at this link: <http://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/councilrules/rules-of-council.aspx>)? Right now the invocation period is left up to the council president to proselytize his own particular faith as Yarborough has done during his term as council president. That rule should be changed.



Based on Yarborough's words in interviews and based on the fact that the two people that have given the invocation at the city council meetings since Yarborough became council president said "in Jesus' name,

we pray,” one can conclude that Yarborough will only let people who agree to say those words give the invocation. In my view Yarborough is proselytizing his own particular faith by requiring that “in Jesus’ name we pray” be said at council meetings. I believe that violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment and the ruling in *Greece v. Galloway*.

Here is a link to one interview by Mark Wood of the Florida Times-Union to make my point: <http://jacksonville.com/opinion/blog/400564/mark-woods/2010-04-17/councilman-takes-turn-answering-questions>. The interviewer asks the questions in bold and then Yarborough’s answers are shown. Excerpts from that interview:

**MW: Do you believe prayer is acceptable in a public building?**

CY: Absolutely. Our nation was founded on Christian principles. It’s all intertwined in our founding documents to where there was recognition of the creator and of Judeo-Christian beliefs. Those are foundational in the laws we have. People continue to bring it up, and I still can’t find something lending to the separation of church and state in the Constitution. So that kind of throws me for a loop sometimes. Some base it on what Thomas Jefferson might have written somewhere else, but I still have a disagreement on that. It’s intertwined in the founding of the country and the laws that we have, that we need to acknowledge God and we need to uphold what honors him. And the public building or the public square, I couldn’t fathom trying to restrict the ability of the public to do that. We shouldn’t keep trying to push God out of country and out of our government.

**MW: Just in general, do you believe Muslims should be able to hold any public office in Florida?**

CY: I don’t know.

**MW: Do you believe all kinds of prayers are acceptable in public buildings? If not, which prayers are acceptable?**

CY: The scripture teaches that unless one prays in the name of Jesus Christ, and since he is our only way to the Father, that that is how one should pray. And that is what I believe.



**Jacksonville City Councilman Clay Yarborough: Loves Jesus but doesn’t quite understand the First Amendment.**

I have been told that Greg Anderson will most likely be the next Council President. Here is an article about him: <http://jacksonville.com/opinion/2015-02-26/story/meet-candidate-greg-anderson>. You can reach Greg Anderson at: (904) 630-1398 or [GAnderson@coj.net](mailto:GAnderson@coj.net). Don’t you think it would be a good idea to get this resolved BEFORE Anderson becomes council president?

Here is a clip from the city council meeting where Council Member Redman interrogated Parvez Ahmed, a respected member of our community (and a participant in the Free Speech Symposium held at UNF last month): <http://jacksonville.com/video/news/metro/2010-04-28/watch-councilman-don-redman-asking-parvez-ahmed-recite-prayer-your-god>. A city attorney had to stop Redman's horrible interrogation. I continue to think that Council President Yarborough's insistence on saying Baptist prayers before city council meetings breeds the kind of rude behavior that Redman demonstrated.

The ACLU persuaded Council President Webb to change his policy regarding the invocation during city council meetings (that agreement can be found at this link: <http://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/invocationpolicy.aspx>) but it wasn't binding to future council presidents. After Webb left office, Bishop became Council President and appointed Yarborough as chaplain. Of course, Yarborough said "in Jesus' name we pray" while he was chaplain. After Bishop, Gulliford became council president, and he did have some diversity during the invocation period. Gulliford even had a flute player one time which perhaps represented the non-religious invocation. Yarborough became council president after Gulliford. As Yarborough mentioned in the above interview, he has allowed only people that say "in Jesus' name we pray" to give the invocation while he has been council president.

For your handy reference here (<http://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/misc/ogc-invocationopinion-2014-09-20.aspx>) is the memo from the city attorney to Council President Yarborough after Yarborough asked if he could say prayers at council meetings.

If you haven't already signed the petition, please do so. Please ask your friends to sign the petition. You can find it at this link: <https://www.change.org/p/sign-our-petition-in-the-name-of-unity>

Once you're on the petition website, you can scroll thru the answers that people gave as to why they signed the petition. The President of the FCFS signed the petition on 10/4/2014. You can find his answer on the petition website. Here it is for your reading pleasure:

"This petition is important to me because citizens of any community are diverse, coming from many social, economic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Although we come from many viewpoints, many worldviews, we are united, whether we like it or not. Humans are social, and we should embrace our diversity. We have seen examples throughout history where diversity has not been respected, and we have seen its outcome. I signed this petition as a member of a global society. We are not just citizens of Jacksonville. We are Floridians, Americans, inhabitants of Earth, and citizens of the galaxy. Our government should embrace pluralism, be it religious, economic, or ethnic pluralism. We are from many, one. We must have a government that embraces pluralism. A government that does anything else is not for the people." — Earl Coggins

Please also consider joining the Facebook group dedicated to petition:

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

**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, poetry, etc. should be e-mailed to [Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org). Material may be submitted only ELECTRONICALLY. Submissions may be formatted in MS Word, in a text file, or cut and pasted into an e-mail.

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*. Authors (not the First Coast Freethought Society) are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.



# Volunteer Opportunity - Dignity U Wear

**Celia Abbruzzese**  
**Community Outreach Chair**

**Dignity U Wear**  
136 North Myrtle Avenue  
Jacksonville, FL 32204

Phone: (904) 636-9455  
Toll-Free: (888) 364-1305  
Fax: (904) 636-8649  
[www.DignityUWear.org](http://www.DignityUWear.org)



## The next DUW is May 16, 2015, 9:00 a.m.

Remember, a good FCFS turn-out will enable this volunteer activity to continue. Join us as we help our fellow human beings who are less fortunate. To see how it works, read on.

## The Way It Works

On the third Saturday of each month, from 9:00 a.m. until noon, FCFS members and friends gather, together with the Jacksonville Atheist Meetup group (JAM), to volunteer at the Dignity U Wear (DUW) environmentally-controlled warehouse. Come to 136 North Myrtle Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32204. Sign in at the door with your name and group. In air-conditioned comfort, sort and fold new clothing to assist those in need. (Closed-toed shoes are required, as this is a working warehouse. Children under 16 are not allowed; children 16 and over are welcome, attended or unattended.) For dates and further details, visit the website: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/component/content/article/50/150>

## 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.

## Membership

If you share our world view and would like to be a part of the FCFS, we encourage you to join. If you are new, or if you are renewing and your contact info has changed, you can pick up an application or a brochure at a meeting, or you can download and print an application on our website: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/app> and mail it in.

- You can join online: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/support>
- You can join by mail: Send your application and check, payable to the FCFS, to PO Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591.

## Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244.

Directions: From the I-295 Roosevelt exit, go north to the first traffic light, Collins Rd. Turn right. Go 400 feet. The church driveway will be on your right.

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

- Two monthly **humanist book discussion groups**, one in Jacksonville and one in St. Augustine. Current books are listed in each newsletter. For further details, visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/bdg>.
- A monthly **social and dinner at the Olive Garden**. See details in each newsletter.
- **Secular Sunday in the Park** - Coffee and conversation in the fresh air on a monthly basis. 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 Doubters** (when scheduled).
- **Dignity U Wear** - a volunteer opportunity on a monthly basis at the Dignity U Wear warehouse in Jacksonville. Visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/component/content/article/50/150> for details. Currently scheduled for the third Saturday morning of each month, from 9:00 a.m. - noon, through December 2015.
- A **Yahoo! Group** for freethinkers. To subscribe, send a blank message to [jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahoogleroups.com](mailto:jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahoogleroups.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 2015 Board Members

President - Earl Coggins: 904-521-5039

Vice President - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Secretary - Liz DuClose: 352-260-2880

Treasurer - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390

At-Large - Herb Gerson: 904-363-6446

At-Large - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610

At Large - John Ruskuski: 904-419-8826

## Other Appointments

Parliamentarian - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896

E-mail Secretary - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

## Committees and Chairs

Community Outreach - Celia Abbruzzese: 904-982-8431

Editorial - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610

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)

# June 15, 2015 Meeting

## Carrie Renwick, Program Chair

In June, we will be hosting a Mystery Guest whom you will not want to miss!

## 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 remains a vital Voice of Reason in Northeast Florida.

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, PO 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, May 11 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Friday, May 15 - [Secular St. Augustine Meetup](#) - St. Augustine, 7:00 p.m. (Meetups are generally the third Friday, but you need to visit the website to RSVP and for meeting details.)
- Saturday, May 16 - Dignity U Wear, 9:00 a.m.
- Monday, May 18 - FCFS Monthly Meeting at Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church, 6:30 p.m.
- Saturday, May 23 - FCFS January 2015 Newsletter Deadline
- Sunday, May 24 - FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville, 10:00 a.m.
- Tuesday, May 26 - FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville, 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, June 6 - Celebration of Life for Wilhelmina Walton at the Unitarian Church in Arlington, 11:00 a.m.
- Sunday, June 7 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville, 3:00 p.m.
- Monday, June 8 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Thursday, June 11 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine, Anastasia Island, 7:00 p.m.

- Monday, June 15 - FCFS Monthly Meeting at Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church - 6:30 p.m.

## Directions to Monthly Meeting at BBUUC

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 [website](#).

to print the application and mail it in with your check, or join on our

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