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**August 2015**

**Volume 14, Issue 8**

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## August 2015 Meeting

- **What:** FCFS Monthly Meeting
- **Who:** Jay S. Huebner, BSEE, MS & PhD, Physics; Professor of Physics from 1972 to 2014, Visiting Research Professor from 2005 to 2014, now Physics Professor Emeritus, University of North Florida
- **Title:** "Colonization of the Inner Solar System"

- **When:** Monday, August 17, 2015, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:00 p.m.)
- **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

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## Meeting Description

The resources of energy and materials in the inner solar system dwarf those available on Earth, and we, as scientists and engineers, know enough about how to use them in ways that will be described and illustrated in this presentation. Ways in which we can build manufactured planets that can allow us to live there in larger numbers, and with higher living standards than we will be able to have on earth. It also seems likely that in these habitats, humans can live longer and healthier lives than on earth.

## Meet the Speaker

Dr. Jay Huebner received his BS from Kansas State University in Electrical Engineering, his MS from San Diego State University in Nuclear Physics, and his PhD from the University of California - Riverside in Solid State and Surface Physics. He received postdoctoral training in Membrane Biophysics at Michigan State University; in Photo-biochemistry at the National Naval Medical Center; in Membrane Photo-chemistry at the School of Chemistry, Georgia Institute of Technology; in Bio-membrane Photo-chemistry at Osnabrueck University in Germany, as a Senior Fulbright Scholar; and in Optics and Observational Astronomy at the Keck Observatory in Hawaii.



Dr. Huebner has Industrial experience as an electrical engineer in the petrochemical industry; in the aerospace industry (working on the Atlas rocket system which is still being manufactured and used for a launch vehicle); as a research and development scientist in the electronics component manufacturing industry; and in forensics consulting on about 50 cases for attorneys practicing in Jacksonville. In academics, Dr. Huebner was a founding faculty member of UNF, where his career has included being Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Visiting Research Professor (all of Physics), and is currently Physics Professor Emeritus at UNF. He is also Interim Chair of Electrical Engineering, as well as Technical Director of the Traffic Enforcement Technology Laboratory for UNF's Institute of Police Technology and Management. He is the ad hoc leader of the Sensors Group (see [www.sensorsgroup.com](http://www.sensorsgroup.com)), and he has five patents on chemical sensors and is working to commercialize them with a start-up company, North Florida Scientific, LLC.

Lastly, Jay is a long-time member and supporter of the First Coast Freethought Society. His August 17 presentation is about manufactured habitats in space, and the title of his talk is, "Colonizing the Inner Solar System."

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# President's Message for August - About Earl Coggins - Not by Him!

## Carrie Renwick

The news is good! Earl has suggested we use the President's Message slot this month for a little update on his medical situation and to say he plans to have a real President's Message in this slot in September.

As most of you no doubt are aware, this past December, Earl underwent emergency abdominal surgery to repair a perforation of his colon and allow it to heal—and to save his life. Recuperation was arduous, but he succeeded.

I'm delighted to report that several weeks ago, Earl underwent the planned surgery to reconstruct his anatomy. The procedure went very well, and he is once again on the road to recovery. He sends everyone his best and in particular, sends his warmest thanks for all the get-well wishes and words of support he has received from so many wonderful freethought friends during this time.

Earl expects to be back at the helm of the First Coast Freethought Society, soon.



Way to go, dude, we're all proud of you!

## August 25, 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, **AUGUST 25**, 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!

# A Faith Lift We Don't Need

**Fred W. Hill**

While cruising down the I-75 highway in central Florida, I saw a billboard with the message, "America Needs a Faith Lift!" While riding in a bicycle rickshaw in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a freethinking couple, Avijit Roy and Rafida Bonya Ahmed, were attacked by Islamist fanatics – Ahmed survived, but with serious wounds; Roy died, having enraged his attackers for having dared to publish ideas they didn't like, including his last book, *The Virus of Faith*. Machete armed fanatics have murdered several other freethought bloggers in Bangladesh, and the government has responded only tepidly, apparently fearful of offending religious zealots who believe anyone who dares question their particular dogma deserves to be murdered. In the United States, the faith virus has infected the ever-growing number of candidates vying to replace Barack Obama in the White House in 2017, nearly all promising to be holier than anyone else and to undo decades of secular progress during their first day in office, stoking fears that America "is moving rapidly towards the criminalization of Christianity," as former Arkansas governor and current presidential hopeful, Mike Huckabee, fulminated during a conference call with the Family Research Center on April 23, 2015, aghast at the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that held state laws barring same-sex couples from marrying are unconstitutional. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, Raif Badawi languishes in prison for the crime of having "insulted Islam" on a blog, arrested in 2012, sentenced to 10 years in prison, a fine and 1,000 lashes, a sentence upheld by the Saudi Supreme Court. Saudi Arabia, of course, is a nation where religion and state are very closely tied together, and faith is the law of the land, which I'm sure would please whoever paid thousands of dollars for that billboard message along I-75, if only the Saudis had the "right" faith.



**Avijit Roy (9/12/72 - 2/26/15), author and on-line secular activist, founder of Mukto-Mona, an internet community of predominantly Bengali and other south Asian freethinkers and humanists. Murdered by machete-wielding religious zealots.**

During the 1960 U.S. presidential campaign, then Senator John F. Kennedy spoke to a group of protestant ministers in Houston to assure them that although he was a Catholic, he would not be taking orders from the Pope and, in his public duties as an elected official, would adhere to the constitution and other laws of the state, rather than the dictates of any church. "I believe in an America," he informed them, "where the separation of church and state is absolute—where no Catholic prelate would tell the President

(should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote—where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference—and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.” Kennedy went on to become the first, and so far only, Catholic to be elected President of the U.S. During the 2012 campaign, former Senator Rick Santorum, currently one of several Catholics seeking the presidency, claimed that reading Kennedy’s speech made him want to throw up, apparently planning to take orders directly from the Pope, except when they conflict with orders from his corporate benefactors, such as on issues related to global climate change and social justice for all people, including affordable health care.

Fortunately, the chances of Santorum becoming our second Catholic president appear remote. Unfortunately, the possibility that a religious fanatic, or even someone who may not truly believe the religious nonsense he or she spouts but is inclined to do everything possible to win the votes of genuine fanatics, may yet win the highest office in our land cannot be entirely discounted. Several of our presidents over the last few decades, including Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush, have expressed deep religious feelings. Certainly, the latter two courted the support of ultra-conservative religious American citizens. The U.S. has also had several presidents, including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, and Ulysses S. Grant, who had expressed much skepticism about popular religious beliefs, although usually in private correspondence rather than in public statements. Being too openly skeptical of Christian dogma, after all, would likely have skewered their political careers, as happened with Robert Ingersoll, regarded as one of the best public speakers of the 19th century and who might have been very successful in politics had he not also been widely known as the Great Agnostic and a debunker of religious idiocy. Over a century later, candidates who profess to believe in religious dogma, despite the preponderance of contrary scientific evidence, still win too many races at all levels of government and are struggling hard to win dominance over all three branches of the federal government. They’d also love to change the U.S. Constitution, to pretend that it is a work of a god rather than of people, to declare that the U.S. is a Christian nation, and to make prayers mandatory at all public schools and government meetings. To make Americans ever so much more faithful that they feel compelled to murder or harshly punish anyone who dares challenge their religious beliefs. To make the United States more like Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, and other nations that don’t recognize any separation of church and state and where questioning religious beliefs, even in cyberspace, can be a very dangerous activity.



**In 1960, John F. Kennedy (left) said church and state should be kept separate; in 2012, Rick Santorum (right) said that idea made him want to vomit, and he is now campaigning to become our**

**next President, so he can re-unite church and state, and party like it's 1499.**

I am hopeful enough to trust that the vast majority of U.S. voters do not actually favor transforming our nation into a theocracy and would soundly reject faith-infected presidential candidates who profess a desire to dismantle the wall between church and state. Too much unquestioning faith in anything has proven detrimental to human rights and destructive to human lives throughout history. Faith demands that we believe without evidence, that we willfully ignore contrary evidence, and that we destroy anything that may in any way diminish our faith. The entire world could do much better with far less faith and far more questioning of dogmas. The U.S. certainly has many wrinkles, serious problems that are routinely ignored by too many of our local, state, and federal elected leaders who seem to think the answers to everything can be found in books filled with ancient myths. A national faith lift would only increase our troubles. What we really need is a global lift in sanity and reason to deal realistically with our problems, and so that no one has to fear being punished by their government, or murdered by mobs far too full of faith, simply for sharing rational ideas and engaging in freethought.

# 2015 NPR Corporate Sponsorship Fund Drive - Update

## Carrie Renwick, Fundraising Chair

As you know, each year the First Coast Freethought Society conducts a fund drive to keep our National Public Radio announcements about the FCFS and our monthly meetings going strong on NPR member radio station WJCT, 89.9 FM. Our "Voice of Reason" on Florida's first coast!

NPR-o-Meter

## NPR Fund Drive Progress - We're Almost There!

As of this writing, Tuesday, August 11, 2015 (approximately two months into the fund drive), we have received \$6,000 toward our goal of \$6,700. That's 90%. Let's go over the top in August! If you are planning to contribute and have not yet done so, now would be a great time. If you haven't thought of contributing, we strongly urge you to consider it. Seven hundred dollars is surely doable!



While we welcome contributions to the NPR fund all year long, please bear in mind that this is our ONLY fund drive per year. We will not pester you again with fundraising until summer of 2016!

No amount is too small. You can be part of keeping our NPR announcements on the air, which may well be the most significant project the FCFS undertakes for the community, not just for the FCFS, but for the

cause of all nonreligious people like us.

## 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!



# 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:
  - September 6, 2015 - *Why Are You Atheists So Angry?* by Greta Christina
  - October 4, 2015 - *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction*, by Julie Ingersoll

Why are atheists angry? Is it because they're selfish, joyless, lacking in meaning, and alienated from God? Or is it because they have legitimate reasons to be angry—and are ready to do something about it? Armed with passionate outrage, absurdist humor, and calm intelligence, popular blogger Greta Christina makes a powerful case for outspoken atheist



activism and explains the empathy and justice that drive it. This accessible, personal, down-to-earth book speaks not only to atheists, but also to believers who want to understand the so-called new atheism. *Why Are You Atheists So Angry?* drops a bombshell on the destructive force of religious faith—and gives a voice to millions of angry atheists.



(From the product description on Amazon.com)

**Link to Book Review:** <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wwjtd/2013/05/review-why-are-you-atheists-so-angry/>

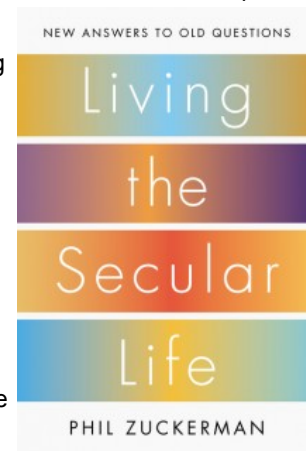
**For More Info:** Contact Fred W. Hill at [frednotfaith2@aol.com](mailto:frednotfaith2@aol.com), or call 904-880-3887.

## 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:
  - September 10, 2015 - *Living the Secular Life*, by Phil Zuckerman
  - October 8, 2015 - *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible*, by Jerry A. Coyne

Over the last twenty-five years, “no religion” has become the fastest growing religion in the United States. Around the world, hundreds of millions of people have turned away from the traditional faiths of the past and embraced a secular—or nonreligious—life, generating societies vastly less religious than at any other time in human history. Revealing the inspiring beliefs that empower secular culture—alongside real stories of nonreligious men and women, based on extensive in-depth interviews from across the country—*Living the Secular Life* is an indispensable handbook for millions of secular Americans.

Drawing on innovative sociological research, *Living the Secular Life* illuminates this demographic shift with the moral convictions that govern secular individuals, offering crucial information for religious and nonreligious alike. *Living the Secular Life* reveals that, despite opinions to the contrary, nonreligious Americans possess a unique moral code that allows them to effectively navigate the complexities of modern life. Spiritual self-reliance, clear-eyed pragmatism, and an abiding faith in the Golden Rule to adjudicate moral decisions, such common principles—among others—are shared across secular society. *Living the Secular Life* demonstrates these principles in action and points to their usage throughout daily life.



Phil Zuckerman is a sociology professor at Pitzer College, where he studied the lives of the nonreligious for years before founding a Department of Secular Studies—the first such academic program in the nation dedicated to exclusively studying secular culture and the sociological phenomena of America’s fastest growing “faith.” Zuckerman discovered that despite the entrenched negative beliefs about nonreligious people, American secular culture is grounded in deep morality and proactive citizenship—indeed, some of



the very best that the country has to offer.

*Living the Secular Life* will be a cherished guide for years to come. A manifesto for a booming social movement—and a revelatory survey of this overlooked community—*Living the Secular Life* offers essential and long-awaited information for anyone building a life based on their own principles.

(From the product description by Penguin Press)

**Link to Book Review:** <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/books/review/living-the-secular-life-by-phil-zuckerman.html>

**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.

# Contacting Jacksonville City Council Members Regarding Sectarian Invocations at their Meetings

## Susan Ert-Ker

I encourage others to write city council members asking them to please change rule 1.106 which permits the President of the City Council to appoint a member as a Chaplain to begin each council meeting with a prayer, so that future council presidents don't do what Yarborough did during his reign as council president, having each meeting begin with a Christian prayer and not allowing for any diversity in the invocations. Here is my email that I sent to Council Member Brown.

Council Member Brown:

I appreciated your question that you asked at the city council meeting on June 23rd of Karen Cogburn after she read the Humanist Affirmations.

I think many government meetings are opened with a moment of



silence. And I have heard that many government meetings (and certainly most if not all business meetings) open with no invocation at all.

It is true that I like the idea of the invocation being rotated among all groups in town. I think that could showcase Jacksonville's diversity. BUT I can see that would be cumbersome and time consuming for the person assigned the task of accepting applications. I wonder if you were specifically asking for a town that has embraced the rotation scheme into their invocation policy and that is working well for them. I loved the way Karen answered your question: "The golden rule. Be the model."

Are you considering a proposal to change rule 1.106? That would be such good news. Do you think you have the 10 votes once the new council takes its seat? I would like rule 1.106 to be changed so that future Council Presidents can't do what Yarborough did during his reign as Council President.

You can see the petition with over 500 signatures at this link: [au.org/UniteUs](http://au.org/UniteUs).

Here is the link to the First Coast Connect show that featured Rabbi Merrill Shapiro (President of the National Board of Trustees of Americans United for Separation of Church and State) and Earl Coggins (President of First Coast Freethought Society) talking about city council rule

1.106: <http://news.wjct.org/post/062215-sectarian-prayer-city-council-meetings-backyard-chickens-cole-pepper>.

Twenty-four of us showed up at the June 23, 2015 City Council Meeting to ask the City Council to change rule 1.106. Here is the link to the meeting archive page:

<http://www.coj.net/city-council/city-council-meetings-online/2015-council-vchive.aspx#Council>. (Scroll down to June 23, 2015 and click "Meeting Video" link.)

I do hope it is good news and that rule 1.106 will be changed to reflect the diversity of our city. Please keep me posted.

Thanks!

Susan

- Link to article on how to address a Council Member: <http://www.formsofaddress.info/Councilman.html>
- Link to list of council members: <http://www.coj.net/city-council.aspx>
- The address for all the council members: City Hall, 117 W. Duval Street, Suite 425, Jacksonville, FL 32202



## State - Church Separation Update

## **A regular feature of the *First Coast FreeThinker***

In this feature, you will be kept apprised of the actions of the First Coast Freethought Society, the local AU chapters which include AU of Northeast Florida and the Clay County Chapter, as well as AU on the national level. If separation of state and church issues are important to you, we encourage you to first join the First Coast Freethought Society, then join AU!

- For the FCFS: click "Join, Renew, Donate" at <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>.
- For the local (NE Florida) AU: <https://www.facebook.com/jacksonvilleAU>
- For the Clay County AU: Click "Join/Donate" at <http://www.claycountyau.com>
- For the National AU: <https://support.au.org/donate>.

## **Clay County Chapter AU Meeting**

- What: Speaker Julie J. Ingersoll, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Florida
- When: Saturday, October 10, 2015, at 10:00 a.m.
- Where: The Fleming Island Library (i.e., Clay County Public Library, 1895 Town Center Blvd, Orange Park, FL 32003)

For more info: <http://www.claycountyau.com>

## **Jacksonville Activities**

In Jacksonville, efforts continue in support of inclusionary invocations, or no invocation at all, at the start of Jacksonville City Council Meeting. We encourage concerned citizens to write to City Council members asking them to respect the diversity of Jacksonville residents and stop their practice of exclusionary prayers. (See Susan Ert-Ker's article "Contacting Jacksonville City Council Members Regarding Sectarian Invocations at their Meetings" located in this issue, just prior to this update.) For more details on our efforts with the City Council prayer issue thus far, see the FCFS July 2015 President's Message, found at <http://us2.campaign-archive1.com/?u=60a4ff5743d8fe1ceb691b694&id=78e316bb73&e=C5edbf927f>).

# **Brevard County Commissioners Sued for Religious Discrimination David Williamson**

Brevard County, FL - The Brevard County Board of County Commissioners' policy of discrimination is based solely on religion and relegates non-believers to second-class status.

Central Florida Freethought Community (CFFC) is one of several local and national organizations jointly filing suit in federal court today against Brevard County. The groups assert that the County's continual rejection of atheists, humanists, and other non-believers who wish to offer a secular invocation before board meetings, violates the U.S. and Florida Constitutions.

David Williamson, CFFC founder and co-plaintiff said, "After more than a year of politely asking for equal treatment, and being denied, we are left with no other option. The Commissioners have not simply ignored our requests, but denied them after public hearings and unanimous votes by the Commissioners. Each time the decisions were justified only by our lack of belief in a god."



The lawsuit notes that in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the U.S. Supreme Court made clear that local governments may not discriminate based on religion when choosing who will deliver solemnizing statements to open government meetings. Yet Brevard County is doing exactly that by refusing to allow anyone who does not profess monotheistic beliefs to offer an official invocation.

"Over the last half-century, our country has made great progress—both legally and socially—toward eradicating discrimination and meeting the goal of equality for all, which lies at the heart of our Constitution," asserts the lawsuit. "Discrimination based on race, gender, national origin, disability, and (more recently) sexual orientation, has become prohibited or disfavored. Nevertheless, in Brevard County's eyes, people who do not believe in God remain a disfavored minority against whom it is acceptable to discriminate."

Plaintiffs in the lawsuit include the Central Florida Freethought Community, its chair David Williamson, the Space Coast Freethought Association, its president Chase Hansel, the Humanist Community of the Space Coast, its president Keith Becher, and Brevard resident Ronald Gordon.

"Brevard County's invocation policy blatantly discriminates against people who do not believe in God," said Alex J. Luchenitser, Associate Legal Director of Americans United and lead counsel in the case. "Such rank discrimination is plainly unconstitutional."

ACLU of Florida Legal Director Nancy G. Abudu said, "If a government decides to have a forum that is open for public voices, then it must make it open to all voices—they don't get to pick and choose. When the Board of County Commissioners blocks one group from having their voices heard, they are essentially saying to these citizens that their beliefs make them unwelcome in their own community. It's unfair, discriminatory, and unconstitutional."

Freedom From Religion Foundation Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said: "The framers of our entirely secular and godless Constitution did not find it necessary to pray during the four months the Constitutional Convention met. Why then should it be necessary for county commissioners to pray over liquor licenses, variances and other lesser matters? But if religious citizens are permitted to open county board meetings

with invocations, then secular invocations must also be permitted.”

The case is being litigated by Alex J. Luchenitser, Associate Legal Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State; Americans United Legal Fellow Joshua Hoffer; Rebecca S. Markert and Andrew L. Seidel of the Freedom From Religion Foundation; Abudu and Daniel Tilley of the ACLU of Florida; and Daniel Mach of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Refer to <https://www.invocationsonline.com/localities/brevard-county-fl> for information on the lack of diversity in Brevard County Commission meeting invocations.

*(David Williamson is the founder and director of the Central Florida Freethought Community, and this article has been re-published here with his kind permission. —Editor's Note.)*

## 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 must be submitted 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.

# Florida Humanist Association Presents Its Annual Conference for 2015



## **FREEFLO - short for "Freethought Florida"**

**Freeflo 2015** is the only conference in Florida for humanists, skeptics, atheists, and other freethinkers. It will be held from November 6 through 8, 2015.

This year, the conference kicks off with a Friday evening party, including a live band, hors-d'oeuvres, and karaoke! Saturday starts right off the bat with host of The Thinking Atheist podcast, Seth Andrews, followed by an all-star line-up of authors, bloggers, activists, and freethought movement leaders. Saturday night at dinner you'll be entertained by Dan Barker on piano and the progressive comedy of Stewart Huff.

Sunday will be another full day of presentations, starting off with a recording of The Humanist Hour Podcast with host, Dr. Bo Bennett. Matt Dillahunty, host of The Atheist Experience, will close the conference on Sunday afternoon.

All weekend, local organizations, national advocacy groups, vendors, and others will have exhibit tables open. This is a weekend to remember!

Click here: [www.free-flo.org](http://www.free-flo.org) to register, to book your hotel room, and for more information. Tickets start at \$110.

# Freethought Cruise 2016

## *With Dr. Darrel Ray*



### Join us on a 3-night Bahamas Cruise February 5 - 8, 2016

Departing from Port Canaveral, Florida, on Royal Caribbean's *Enchantment of the Seas*. More information at: <https://freethoughtcruise.wordpress.com/2015/02/05/freethought-cruise-information/>

## Now, to our Off-Shore Correspondent in Thailand... “Of Fish and Men”

### 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)*

On a recent visit to the beautiful Thai area off the coast of Krabi and the islands, I had the occasion to snorkel from the side of a boat. To "entice" the fish to come closer to the divers, I helped the boat people spread bread into the water. Huge schools of beautiful, tropical fish swarmed around the tiny pieces of floating bread. As I often do, I began to think about politics and religion. It became clear that these fish function as one living thing and make little difference to the school. Each fish is nothing more than an eating/breeding machine to keep the species alive. The bread disappeared into their mouths, and soon I lost track of the individual fish, the individual mouths, and realized that the function of the fish, as a school, is to survive. If a



predator were to attack the school and gobble down some of the fish, the rest of the school would go on feeding and breeding. The purpose of the individual fish is of little importance, as long as the species survives. This, of course, is the beauty of evolution and the brilliant observations made by Darwin long ago.



The fact that the religious deny this reality is simply another example of the ridiculousness of blind belief and ignorance. The beautiful brutality of evolution is a marvel to behold. Observing the fish was a religious-like experience for me. After watching this natural event and surviving the perilous boat ride on the open ocean back to the safety and comfort of my lovely cabin-hotel room, I thought about the human animal and how it differs from this school of fish. While we certainly want to believe in our exceptionalism and the fact that our individual existence is far more important than a single fish in a school, I'm not so very sure that it does.

A very small number of human individuals of the 25 billion or so, who have ever lived, contributed to the future of our species. Some, like Genghis Kahn, served as a DNA source for an enormous amount of human beings. Others, like Einstein, Bill Gates, and Gandhi, have made lasting contributions to human technology and thinking. Evil humans, like Hitler, Stalin and Mao, or Martin Luther and George W. Bush, caused enormous suffering and even death of our species.

While climate change does threaten many species, there are nearly 8 billion human beings on this planet, more individuals than ever have been alive at anytime in the history of mankind and probably nearly a third who have ever lived. This is a staggering statistic and needs to be fully appreciated for the incredible effect it will have on this planet.



**A school of tropical fish and a diver off a coast of Thailand**

My dad died in May of 2014 at the age of 92. He was born in 1922, and when he was born, on this planet there were just 2 billion other human beings living on earth. It took humanity 150,000 years of existence or so (forget that Christian BS about 6,000 years) for the human population to reach 1 billion in 1805 or so. In just 120 years, humans doubled the living population, and my wonderful dad was among that number. On



his death, the UN estimated that human population was about 7.3 billion. This means that in just one human lifetime, my dad's, humanity added 5.3 billion living souls to the planet Earth. In my dad's 92 years, the earth had to find a way to sustain the lives of 5 billion more people than it ever had.

The resources of the planet, which had not been added to much, now had to supply 5 times more human beings than ever before and many of us at an unprecedentedly high level of existence. I'm not a great mathematician, but the exponential growth of population is truly staggering. Even when I was a kid, there was a great amount of wild land right near our cities. Today, you have to drive for hours to find such land.

When I was a kid, there were 200 million Americans, today there are 300 million. The land did not grow, so it has to accommodate a third more people. This is also the economic statistic no one ever talks about, but when there were 200 million Americans, jobs paid better and were more plentiful than now, when there are 300 million competing for diminishing jobs, not to mention the fact that employers can outsource to cheaper workers elsewhere today. Let's stick with the numbers, though, for a moment. All the potable water that has ever existed on this planet is the same today as it was 150,000 years ago. In fact, while population has grown exponentially, potable water has actually declined, as we have polluted existing supplies and taken water out of the system to be used for industrial, pharmaceutical, and other uses. Today, potable water is used in the fracking process, and no one is quite sure whether it will ever be filtered by earth and replenished into aquifers or not. Only about 3% of the water on the planet is drinkable. At the time of the mythical Jesus, 2000 years ago, there are estimated to have been 300 million human beings on the planet, about the population of the United States. Today there are 7.3 billion people in need of potable water, and the same amount of water, or less, exists on the planet. Soon, wars will be fought to protect and gain fresh water supplies. For those of you with imagination, next time you take a big mouthful of water on a hot Cowford afternoon, think about the fact that the same water might have been in the mouth of the mythical Jesus, or Alexander the Great, or perhaps once urinated by Julius Caesar! Yes, that EXACT water, not water like it, THAT water. The water was used, urinated out, or returned to the earth in death. It was evaporated and rained back down, and the earth did its amazing cleansing action, so that it could be used again and again and again! But today, fresh water is an endangered resource, and the future portends greater and greater problems from a corporate-owned resource, much of which has been destroyed by pollution and a burgeoning population.

Before you panic, are there solutions? Perhaps. Desalination is an option, but an expensive one that requires a great deal of oil and energy and produces a lot of waste material. While rich nations, like the US, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and Israel are and will desalinate, it surely won't help areas of vast overpopulation and desertified lands like Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, where millions will invariably die from lack of water. Climate change and the destruction of historic sources of water, like the run-off from the Himalayan mountains, will threaten the fresh water supply to 80 million Indians.

**Site of what was once Lake Tulare in California, formerly the largest freshwater lake in the United States west of the Mississippi River and south of the Great Lakes.**



So, let's get back to my school of fish in the ocean off Thai shores. Our intelligence gives us a great deal of self-knowledge and a belief in self-worth. Religion adds an element to these self-important feelings, of course. Human morality, which certainly does not come from religion, has also made the single human life an important commodity. I came to a very interesting psychological and philosophical question. Is the life of one human being really more important than one of those fish in the school off Krabi? Ya, I know one of those people could invent a cheap desalination concept, one could help us to live in space or on another planet, one could end war, one could end religion. I know, I know, but the vast majority, in fact, virtually most will make no contribution whatsoever other than leaving some DNA for other members of our species to carry on...just like the fish in that school.

Are we so unique or do we simply delude ourselves with that idea? Does the life of one individual really matter so much? And if not, how should this drive social policy? Is it fair that a very small number of people are permitted to accumulate great wealth while others literally starve to death? In the world of today, 350 individual human beings have more wealth than the bottom 3.5 billion human beings. We don't need to argue whether they "earned" that wealth, as most wealth is inherited, and the rapidly accelerated accumulation has been propelled and intensified by taxation and regulation schemes and manipulated political power in ways that would hardly be considered earning. The so-called job creators have been anything but that, worldwide. While these 350 individuals live an unprecedented life of immense wealth and pleasure, 300 children starve to death every 10 minutes in our world. That Christians promote this system, brag about it, and strive to achieve it, should make even the most religious among them wretch.

America is a nation owned and governed by the top 1/2% of the most wealthy who share 90% or so of its wealth, while paying little back in taxes to support the society.

While there are interesting differences between human society and a school of fish, and certainly the intelligence and self awareness of human beings makes a huge difference, the evolutionary future of mankind is tied to the biology of that school we all inhabit. We have knocked biology on its ear in the 92 years that my dad lived on this planet. We cured diseases, created vaccines, and increased the human life span by 40 years in the 20th century. Our biggest developments have been in the area of sanitation, where we have learned to separate people from their waste and have kept diseases from occurring. Whatever your philosophical perspective or your political one, human beings are not solitary creatures who are capable of survival and flourishing on their own. No, libertarians, we are not a male tiger who lives alone until it needs to mate. Sorry, libertarians, but Ayn Rand was a lunatic and a hypocrite who lived off social security as she argued for survival of the fittest in human societies. We live in a species that is the most social of all animals. We need one another in ways that other animals can hardly imagine. Income inequality today is the greatest it has been in the history of mankind, and it illustrates the biggest difference between our species and that school of fish. The greed and self-centered nature of humans could push us to destroy the species in favor of a very small few. Fish would never do this. They are driven to protect the species over the individual. All animals are. But humans, with our intelligence comes hubris, greed, and self-importance. Rather than sacrificing for our fellow creatures, humans take and use resources for their own interests and accumulate great fortunes at the cost of millions of others. When you observe the brutality of a lion killing cubs who aren't his own so that his DNA survives, remember that 350 human beings will have future DNA survive, while 3.5 billion humans will not survive to adulthood. We are one; one species, one society, and we are not solitary individuals who survive by destroying others. Well, we shouldn't be, anyway.



# 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).
- **The Dignity U Wear volunteer activity has been discontinued for the time being. We will keep you posted.**
- 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)

# September 21, 2015 Meeting

## Carrie Renwick, Program Chair

In September, our speaker will be Julie Ingersoll, PhD, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of North Florida. Dr. Ingersoll teaches and writes about religion in American culture, with a special focus on religion and politics, and the religious right. Julie will be discussing her new book, *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

We shall have a BOOK SIGNING and plenty of books available. Note also, on October 10, she is

speaking to the Clay County Chapter of American's United. See "State - Church Separation Update" for details.

# Dignity U Wear Volunteering - Currently Discontinued

**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)



Be advised, the third-Saturday volunteer opportunity at Dignity U Wear has been discontinued, at least for the present time. We'll be happy to arrange future volunteer activities if you wish. Let us hear from you!

Sincerely,  
Celia Abbruzzese  
[catrn1957@yahoo.com](mailto:catrn1957@yahoo.com)

## 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, August 17 - FCFS Monthly Meeting at Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church, 6:30 p.m.
- Saturday, August 22 - FCFS July 2015 Newsletter Deadline
- Sunday, August 23 - FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville, 10:00 a.m.
- Tuesday, August 25 - FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville, 6:00 p.m.
- Sunday, September 6 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville, 3:00 p.m.
- Thursday, September 10 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine, Anastasia Island, 7:00 p.m.
- Monday, September 14- JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. at the San Marco European Street Café (Date, time & place subject to change; please see <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Monday, September 21 - 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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