

# Activist Organizations

## January



On its webpage, the Feminist Majority lists under “Feminist News” news articles of interest to its members. For instance, at the end of January it drew attention to articles titled “Women Sue AT&T for Contraceptive Coverage,” “Title IX Commission To Meet on Final Recommendations: Women’s Groups to Hold Rally,” etc. It also drew attention to a piece that had absolutely nothing to do with its mission: “Alleged Victims Call for Resignation of New Hampshire Bishop.”

## January

The Freedom from Religion Foundation considers its mission as keeping America free by defending separation of church and state. On its webpage it lists various thematic issues of interest to its allies, most of which make sense given its goal: “The Case Against School Prayer,” “Abortion is a Blessing,” and “What’s Wrong With the Ten Commandments?” There was one listing, however, that didn’t make sense from a First Amendment perspective: “The Scandal of Pedophilia in the Church.”

## January 30

**Honolulu, HI**—McKinley High School dropped its code of honor, which included the phrase “love for God.” This was done as part of a settlement with the American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii, which sued the school on the grounds that the code violated the separation of church and state.

## February

**Las Cruces, NM**—The New Mexico chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State sued the city of Las Cruces (which means “the crosses” in Spanish) over its city logo: three crosses in front of a sun burst. They claimed it violated the separation of church and state. The highway department announced the logos would be removed, but Governor

Bill Richardson ordered the agency not to remove any of the signs from state roads.

## **April**

**Madison, WI**—Madison Metro System printed a picture of Mother Teresa on its April bus pass. Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, condemned it as a violation of church and state. A spokeswoman for Metro said Mother Teresa was selected because she made *Time* magazine's list of the 100 Most Important People of the 20th Century. The May bus pass features a picture of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.; Gaylor did not criticize this selection.

## **April 9**

U.S. Secretary of Education Roderick Paige came under fire by secular extremists for extolling Christian values; his comments were made during an interview with the Baptist Press.

"All things being equal," Secretary Paige said, "I would prefer to have a child in a school that has a strong appreciation for the values of the Christian community, where a child is taught to have a strong faith." He also compared public schools unfavorably to Christian schools because of the latter's emphasis on values. He was criticized by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Education Association, the Islamic Networks Group of San Jose and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

The harshest criticism came from Congressman Gary Ackerman of New York, who accused Paige of sponsoring "the Taliban approach to education," and from *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen, who charged Paige with seeking to mainstream the Christian faith into the public school curriculum.

## **April 12**

**Augusta, GA**—A protest criticizing the Augusta National Golf Tournament for not allowing women included a man dressed as a

nun, calling himself Sister Georgina Z. Bush. He was a member of the San Francisco-based Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of homosexual men who dress as nuns. He claimed to be the president of the "Ministry of Propaganda, Inc." for the group. According to the Scripps Howard News Service, "His headdress and shirt had an American flag color scheme and were complemented by tights and rhinestone-studded boots."

#### **April 16**

**Framingham, MA**—Robert Meltzer, a Jewish attorney, filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking to render the practice of putting voting booths in churches unconstitutional. He explained his reaction to voting in a Methodist church: "In order to vote, you basically had to bow before the cross. I was sick for a week." Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, agreed with him: "Asking a feminist to vote in a Roman Catholic Church is like asking a black man to vote in a KKK hall."

#### **April**

**Charlotte, NC**—People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) sponsored a billboard on Interstate 40 featuring a pig with the saying "He Died for Your Sins. Go Vegetarian." Outdoor Ink! was the only company in NC that would display the billboard. The same billboard also appeared in Springfield, MO; Savannah, GA; and Pensacola, FL.

#### **April 28**

**Lexington, VA**—The 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Virginia Military Institute (VMI) must bar cadets from saying a voluntary, nondenominational prayer before they eat. Americans United for Separation of Church and State backed the decision. The judges ruled that because VMI emphasizes discipline, there was nothing voluntary about the prayer.

#### **May**

**Chester County, PA**—The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed suit against the county, maintaining that a Ten

Commandments plaque on the façade of the courthouse is an unconstitutional imposition of religion.

### **May**

**Barstow, CA**—The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the Mojave National Preserve over the right to keep a large cross on public property. As a tribute to veterans, a large cross was erected in 1934 in the park. A battle has been waging over the cross since 2001.

### **May**

**Erie, PA**—The northwestern Pennsylvania chapter of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) embarked on an aggressive campaign, posting signs on the front doors of Catholic schools throughout Erie County urging people to come forward with the names of molesting priests. Erie Bishop Donald Trautman labeled the unauthorized campaign “reprehensible.” He accused those involved of invading private property and of scaring children. The regional group admitted that it cannot name one priest in Erie County who has been accused of abusing children

### **May**

**San Diego, CA**—Mount Soledad Park, in a tribute to war veterans, has long been home to a 43-foot cross. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the park to remove the cross. The controversy has gone on since 1991.

### **June 23**

**Washington, DC**—Judicial Watch, a conservative legal organization, issued a press release in the wake of the resignation of Frank Keating as the head of the National Review Board appointed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to monitor clergy sexual abuse. It objected to having Robert S. Bennett and Leon Panetta as board members.

Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton accused the two of qualifying as “a ‘who’s who’ of cover-up experts, not for

membership on the bishops' National Review Board for combating sexual abuse, or maybe that's the point?" The Catholic League's principal objection was the unwarranted nature of it: whom the bishops appoint to any committee was none of Judicial Watch's business.

## **June 26**

**San Francisco, CA**—At the city's gay pride parade, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of gay men dressed as nuns, had a float called "Weapons of A— Destruction." It portrayed a rocket with a phallic tip and the name "Cheney" painted on it, pointing at a man's buttocks. A man sat beside it simulating sex acts. The crowd gave it a big reception.

## **July**

**Pittsburgh, PA**—A U.S. District judge ordered a teacher's aide to be allowed to return to work after being suspended without pay by the ARIN Intermediate Unit 28 for refusing to cover up or remove a 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch cross that she wore. The judge wrote that the agency's policy was "overtly averse to religion." Americans United for Separation of Church and State had supported punishing the teacher based on an 1895 anti-Catholic law that prohibits teachers from wearing religious symbols or garb. The law was originally written to stop Catholic priests and nuns from teaching in the public schools.

## **September**

**Annapolis, MD**—American Atheists and the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers filed a complaint with the Chief of Naval Operations and the Secretary of Defense to halt the practice of allowing chaplains to lead a prayer at each weekday lunch for midshipmen.

## **September**

**San Francisco, CA**—The Board of Super-visors voted to curtail the free-speech rights of prolife protesters. Previously, before the police could cite demonstrators for harassment, women seeking an abortion had to inform protesters to cease

their expression; alternatively, women had to instruct them that they want to be left alone. Under the new law, the onus is on the protesters: they must first get the consent of women seeking an abortion before exercising their free-speech rights. Mayor Willie Brown signed the legislation.

The Catholic League called the ACLU asking what they were going to do about it. The ACLU had no interest in challenging this gag rule.

### **September 8**

**Washington, DC**—The Catholic League and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty filed a brief before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Locke v. Davey*. The brief argued that it is unconstitutional for the state of Washington to disqualify a student “from an otherwise available government benefit, only because the student would use the benefit for a religious purpose.” The brief took aim at those who seek to legitimate religious discrimination; especially the American Jewish Congress. “It is nothing short of amazing,” the Catholic League said in a news release, “that the American Jewish Congress would file a brief in the year 2003 that argues that some of the fears expressed by 19th century anti-Catholic bigots were real.” The brief by the American Jewish Congress said that anti-Catholic laws “were undertaken in response to positions of the Catholic Church as authoritatively enunciated by consecutive Popes in well publicized encyclicals,” prompting “a legitimate fear” of Catholic domination.

### **September 9**

**New York, NY**—American Atheists again protested the cross memorial that is on the site of the destroyed World Trade Center. Ellen Johnson, president of the group, called the Ground Zero cross “Christian religious advertisement, and allowing it to stay there is an insult to everyone who doesn’t believe in that particular religion.”

### **October 29**

**Norwood, MA**—The Massachusetts Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State asked the Norwood School Committee not to display a nativity scene on the lawn of Balch Elementary School during the coming Christmas season. Local residents had erected the scene for the past few years.

#### **November 4**

**Tipton, IA**—The Iowa Civil Liberties Union sent a letter to Cedar County objecting to a crèche on the courthouse lawn that has been there every Christmas for the past 30 years. The display included a disclaimer that the county does not endorse or sponsor it.

#### **November 10**

**Elizabeth, CO**—The American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado and the Anti-Defamation League threatened to sue the Elbert County Charter School unless it removed all references to Christmas in the school's holiday concert, including the song "Jingle Bells." The letter from both groups alleged that "Jewish students no longer feel safe or welcome" at the school. The principal refused to acquiesce, and with the help of the Alliance Defense Fund, the groups backed off.

#### **November 17**

**Tallahassee, FL**—Florida Attorney General Charlie Crist announced that a Florida State Lottery practice of donating items to a fund-raiser for a Catholic high school would be reviewed to see whether it violates the separation of church and state. Americans United for Separation of Church and State brought the charge. For two years the Florida Lottery supplied 100 packages of golf balls with the lottery logo on them to a charity golf tournament held to raise money for John Paul II Catholic High School.

#### **November 25**

**Baldwin City, KS**—The American Civil Liberties Union of Douglas County, Kansas told the Baldwin City School District that it violated the separation of church and state by allowing a

minister dressed as Santa Claus to talk to students about the meaning of Christmas. He also referred students who needed guidance to Christian resources. It is legal to explain Christmas in schools. The main objection in this case was that the instructor was a member of the Christian clergy.

## **December**

**New York, NY**—In the “Q and A” section on the website of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) dealing with the Christmas season, the ADL stated that the courts have said that Christmas decorations such as Santa Claus or Christmas trees are secular symbols but warned, “Nevertheless, their inordinate usage is inappropriate.” The remainder of the text did not indicate what constituted an inordinate number. It was recommended that parents suggest to teachers “alternate winter decorations, including snow flakes, gingerbread houses, and mittens that may be more inclusive.”

## **December 1**

**Washington, DC**—Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) commenced a “Good Catholics Use Condoms” public education campaign that condemned the Vatican for its opposition to condoms. The group’s director, Frances Kissling, accused the Catholic Church of promoting a culture of death. It included an ad campaign in Washington, D.C. and overseas.

## **December 1**

**Providence, RI**—A billboard sponsored by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) featured a portrait of the Virgin Mary holding a dead chicken. Next to this was the inscription, “GO VEGETARIAN: It’s an Immaculate Conception” (a cross was placed inside the letter O, making it resemble the Celtic cross).

## **December 22**

**Cranston, RI**—The American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island filed a lawsuit against the city of Cranston challenging the display of a life-size nativity scene and a

menorah in front of the city hall as well as the new city policy allowing holiday displays. The city had implemented a policy allowing the mayor to approve of "appropriate holiday" decorations from December 5 to January 1. During this time the lawn of the city hall was designated a "limited public forum open for the purpose of appropriate seasonal and holiday displays."