

ATHEISTS SUE U.S. HOUSE CHAPLAIN

Thursday, May 5, was America's annual National Day of Prayer. So of course the anti-prayer Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) chose that day to sue the chaplain of the U.S. House of Representatives. FFRF president Dan Barker was upset that House chaplain Father Patrick Conroy, a Jesuit priest, declined to invite him to deliver a non-prayer "invocation" on the House floor. FFRF also named House Speaker Paul Ryan, along with several members of Father Conroy's staff, in the lawsuit.

Remarkably, Barker invoked his ordination as a Christian minister 41 years ago to justify his request—even though he later renounced God and proclaimed his atheism. FFRF stated that "Barker, who was a Christian minister for 19 years, retains a valid ordination, which he still uses to perform weddings." Really? Do those he marries know that he has renounced the Christian faith for which he was ordained? In short, do they know that the man is a fraud?

Fortunately, the House chaplain saw through this sham. It has been a long-standing requirement, Father Conroy explained, that any guest chaplain must be "ordained by a recognized body in the *faith in which he/she practices*" (our italics.) "This is a substantive requirement—not a mechanical or check-the-box requirement. For example, we do not invite Member-recommended individuals who have obtained an Internet-generated ordination to serve as guest chaplains, even if they hold deep and long-standing religious beliefs."

All the more reason not to invite as a guest chaplain someone whose deep and long-standing beliefs are *anti-religious*. On a day in which President Obama reminded us of the need to "see God in everyone," FFRF reminded us that they see God in no

one.