

THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

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Briefs

Federal Court ruling allows AHA standing for 2013 school lawsuit

The American Humanist Association (AHA) reported in a press release published June 21 that some progress has been made in a lawsuit the AHA filed in 2013 challenging prayers in South Carolina public education graduation ceremonies and the practice of hosting those ceremonies in a Christian chapel.

Plaintiffs included the AHA, John and Jane Doe, and the Does' daughter Jill, who attended a school in the Greenville County School District in South Carolina. Their lawsuit challenged district policies that prohibit school-sponsored prayer, while still allowing student-initiated and -led prayer. The lawsuit also challenged district policies restricting religious iconography at events, yet permitting events to be held in iconic religious venues, such as a Christian chapel.

On June 21, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit denied the school district's motion to dismiss the plaintiffs' chapel claim, even though the child left the district and moved to Alabama. The court ruled that "because the district court failed to address the merits of that claim, we remand [it] for consideration by the district court..."

The AHA views the district's practices as violating the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Monica Miller, AHA senior counsel, said she is "pleased that the Fourth Circuit is allowing our clients to vindicate their constitutional rights, and we will continue to defend them from government-sponsored religion and coerced participation in religious activity."

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Atheists, secularists protest North Richland Hills City Council promotion of Christianity over other religions and nonreligion

by James Blase

Some 25 people gathered Friday, May 13 around 5:30 p.m. to protest North Richland Hills (NRH) City Council's promotion of Christianity over all other religions and nonreligions. The event was the grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony for the new City Hall at 4301 City Point Dr., North Richland Hills, which prominently displays the motto "In God We Trust."

On various occasions this year members of Metroplex Atheists (MA) have objected to the Council's open displays of preference for Christianity over other religions, including the Council's decision to place an "In God We Trust" sign on the new facility and council members' repeated use of proselytizing, Christian prayers to open official City Council Meetings.

Elizabeth Tarrant, MA president, said recitation of a prayer or a religious invocation to open an official government council meeting violates the wall of separation between the state and the church as spoken about by Thomas Jefferson in reference to the Constitution of the United States.

U.S. Constitution, Amendment 1 contains the establishment clause, which states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..."

German students shocked by U.S. state constitutional limits

HoFW receives appeal for help to stop laws infringements on nontheists' rights

By Wanda Foster

HoFW's humanist German friends from a fellow humanist organization in Regensburg, Bavaria, and students from Frankfurt am Main, Germany's largest city, are worried about nontheist rights in the U.S. and are sounding the alarm that the civil rights of nonreligious people in parts of the U.S. are being violated. They are asking for our help to put domestic and international pressure on the U.S. and on seven U.S. states to abolish wording in their constitutions and laws prohibiting nontheists from running for public office.

Lilith Heiber, a student of politics at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, first sounded the alarm to our sister humanist organization, the 6,000-member Bund für Geistesfreiheit (BFG) Bayern on June 2, but not before doing some research to verify their findings. She was joined by two other students, who are assisting her with a class project to bring international attention to the problem with the goal of pressuring seven states, including Texas, to restore the legal rights of all citizens to run for public office.

The problem first came to their attention when they were reading an article



Protesters at grand opening for new North Richland Hills City Hall call for separation of church and state protection of citizens' rights to freedom of and from religion. photo by James Blase

MA holds that City Council meetings, which are official government gatherings of citizens, should be inclusive for all types of people of all religions or with no religion. MA Member Randy Word said that the "In God we Trust" motto on the new building and use of the phrase "under God" in the pledge of allegiance are exclusionary even though they are legal, but he said the City's Christian prayers before meetings cross the line.

Protesters represented multiple secular organizations, including MA, Humanists of Fort Worth, and Freethinkers. Mark Siskel, a member of Fort Worth Freethinkers, held a sign saying: "In No God Do We Trust," and others held signs bearing the slogans "Democracy Not Theocracy" and "Honor the Constitution."

At least two members of the 950-member Texas Freedom From Religion (continued on page 4)

on the Internet at Thought Catalog, www.thoughtcatalog.com, entitled "67 Ridiculous Laws From Around The World That Still Actually Exist," which was compiled by Rachel Houdin. The first item on the list states that "in several U.S. States, according to their constitutions, atheists are barred from holding public office."

She decided to do additional research and found various publications corroborating this fact. Among the most influential was a 2014 article in the New York Times, entitled, "In Seven States, Atheists Push to end Largely Forgotten Ban" by Laurie Goodstein. That article confirmed that Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas all have constitutions that explicitly exclude nontheists from holding public office.

Heiber, herself a nontheist, said she was shocked to see laws of this type in a western nation, so she discussed it with her classmates, Kalina Atanasova, also a nontheist, and Araylim Gaipova, a theist sympathetic to religious freedom issues.

After more research, the three started pushing a petition on Avaaz in late

May, and she said they need our help. While some of us have signed, it appears that many internationals also are signing across Europe. Signatures have increased from a handful in late May to 226 in late June, but ultimately they will need thousands of U.S. and global signatures to make an impact.

Gaipova, the one theist in the group, actually wrote the final petition, which was posted on Avaaz May 26 with the objective of eventually submitting it to legislators of the seven states and to the U.S. government. This is the link:

https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Legislators_of_7_US_states_US_government_Re-store_the_right_of_nonbelievers_to_held_office_in_the_US/share/?new

To achieve the ambitious aim of getting so many signatures, the students used the strategy of contacting entire organizations and asking them to get members to sign and pass the petition to other organizations to keep the process flowing. So they found the German organization, BFG, online and emailed Erwin Schmid, the organization's chairman, who immediately

(continued on page 4)

Book Review

***The Lives of Margaret Fuller* by John Matteson**

By Morris Meador

Margaret Fuller was and is a surprising person for her time or any time. She lived from 1810 to 1850 and was the first:

- American to write a book about equality for women
- Foreign correspondent and first woman correspondent to serve in combat conditions
- Woman journalist for Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* and the first literary editor of any major American publication
- Woman literary critic who also set literary standards for American writers
- Woman to enter the Harvard College library to pursue research
- Editor of *The Dial*, an American magazine and primary publication of the Transcendental movement
- Woman in America to edit an intellectual publication

The book we discussed at the May and June meetings of the Humanist Book Club is a new biography called *The Lives of Margaret Fuller* by John

Matteson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer from California.

In reading this book, we learned about Fuller’s complicated, tragic life. She was denied entry to Harvard College because she was a woman, but received a rigorous academic education at home from her father. She was very intelligent and a voracious reader. On the other hand, she suffered from inadequate social graces and displayed a cutting wit that alienated many friends. Our Book Club participants discussed how even today intelligent, well-educated women often are resented and stymied. We also discussed the difficulties women face while juggling professional life, home, and family.

Fuller’s education, writing, and teaching skills enabled her to connect with the most important literary group of the day, the Transcendentalist Club. Ralph Waldo Emerson asked her to edit the club’s publication, *The Dial*. Later she taught school at Bronson Alcott’s famous, innovative Temple School. The Transcendentalist Club was the first major male intellectual society to allow women participants. In an 1843 essay in *The Dial*, Fuller held up the egalitarian ideals of the American Revolution and said these ideals should be applied more fully to women, African Americans, and Native Americans.

In a forward-thinking way, she questioned the divide between men and women and saw feminine and masculine conflicts in each person. A series of essays published in *The Dial* later, in 1845, is considered the foundational American document about women’s equality.

During this time, Fuller held meetings she called “conversations” with women at Elizabeth Peabody’s bookstore. Society frowned on women speaking in public, but she argued that nothing could be said about women having conversations.

Conducted for 5 years, the discussions attracted some of the most famous women authors and literary figures in the area. Although the organization was not formed to be political, it became political as slavery and women’s rights issues emerged.

Book Club attendees discussed how Margaret Fuller’s conversations were mirrored in Women’s Liberation groups and rap artists more than 100 years later. We lamented that, while progress has been made, women have yet to reach full equality in our society after more than a century and a half.

Horace Greeley catapulted Fuller onto the international stage when he asked her to write for his reformist newspaper, *The New York Tribune*. There Fuller became the first woman in America to head the literary department of a major newspaper.

Greeley encouraged her to write forcefully. She toured, wrote about, and sought reform for corrupt New York institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and asylums. She later went to Europe with friends and found dismal conditions in England and France as a result of industrial development. Again, she advocated for reform.

Fuller met Italian revolutionary leaders seeking to unite provinces in a democratic union. She traveled to Italy as a war correspondent but soon



became involved in the war after falling in love with a revolutionary 10 years younger than her, Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, having a baby, and getting married. Later she left the baby with others and worked in a hospital of revolutionaries.

Fuller’s story ended tragically when the revolutionaries were defeated, and she decided she must return home. Unfortunately during the trip, she, her new husband, and her small child died when their ship encountered a fierce storm and ran aground on a sand bar within sight of Fire Island. Many passengers swam ashore, but Fuller and her family hesitated and drowned. People on shore might have saved them but were more interested in scavenging cargo.

Emerson sent Henry David Thoreau to look for Fuller’s manuscript about the Roman Revolution, but neither it nor the bodies of Fuller or her husband were found. A child was found and buried at Mt. Alban Cemetery along with a monument erected to Fuller.

Book Club members discussed the propriety of Margaret leaving her baby while helping with the revolution, but compared that to dilemmas modern working mothers face. We discussed the tragedy of her early death and what she might have contributed if she had lived. It is easy to wonder why an epic movie has not been made of her life.

Humanist Book Club resumes monthly meetings
 Morris Meador, organizer of the Humanist Book Club, has returned this quarter after a sabbatical helping Westside UU find a new minister, a difficult task for a 60-percent humanist congregation.
 Book Club sessions are back on track to be held regularly on the fourth Saturday of each month at 3 p.m. The group meets at Westside UU Church, 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth.

	July 2016	August 2016	September 2016
Key HoFW Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular Meeting, Wednesday, July 13, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX ▪ HoFW Book Club, Saturday, July 23 from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX ▪ Regular Dinner Social, Thursday, July 28, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events. Please RSVP if you plan to attend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular Meeting, Wednesday, August 10, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX ▪ Regular Dinner Social, Thursday, August 25, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events. Please RSVP if you plan to attend. ▪ HoFW Book Club, Saturday, August 27, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular Meeting, Wednesday, September 14, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX ▪ Regular Dinner Social, Thursday, September 23, 6:30 p.m. Location to be announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/events. Please RSVP if you plan to attend. ▪ HoFW Book Club, Saturday, September 24, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX
Other Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Metroplex Atheists Annual March in Arlington, July 4th Parade; Meeting in University of Texas at Arlington Parking Lot, southeast corner of Cooper and Mitchell Streets at 8 a.m. This meeting is in the planning stages. Go to the Metroplex Atheist online calendar at this link to verify final plans: http://www.meetup.com/Metroplex-Atheists/events/232010909/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Freethinkers of Fort Worth, Dinners Across Fort Worth; Held Fridays twice monthly; August schedule is August 5th and 19th at 7 p.m.; RSVP at this link: http://www.meetup.com/Freethinkers-of-Fort-Worth/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Movie Night at the Modern, opening reception with cash bar, Thursday, September 1 at 6 p.m. followed by a 1940 spy movie, <i>Foreign Correspondent</i>, at 7. The movie explores the art of espionage. Online ticketing opens August 1. Wanda Foster will organize. Check Meetup calendar.

Letters to the Editor

All HoFW members and other readers who wish to write Letters to the Editor responding to articles that appear in this publication are invited to express their own views and provide feedback.

Our newsletter policy requires letters to reference a specific article that has appeared in one of the two most recent issues. We do not publish open letters or third-party letters.

Responders should limit their letters

to 150 or 175 words and provide the writer’s email address. In addition, for those who require anonymity, please provide the name you would like published with the letter.

All letters should be exclusive to *The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* and should not be published in any other publication.

Anyone who would like to submit a letter can do so by emailing the editor

at the following address: vice-chair@hofw.org.

Space is limited, so we make no guarantee that all letters will be published. Letters may be edited or shortened to fit the space.

We request that all content show a respectful tone, even when the viewpoints expressed differ from those of *The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* or any other party.

THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

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Humanists of Fort Worth

Opinion

HoFW Humanist Perspectives

By Wanda Foster

Longtime HoFW member Joy Counts, 81 and scarcely more than 5 feet tall, wears a ready smile and a personality ready to pick up the tempo again for the next thing life brings. She enjoys an active single life surrounded by humanist and Westside Unitarian-Universalist (UU) friends and her son, David, who she describes as her best friend she is “very thankful” to have.

A former elementary school teacher, she spent 32 years with the love of her life, Woodrow (Woody) Counts, former superintendent of Arlington Independent School District (AISD). After he died in 2006 at 90 years old, she remained several years in a large home they shared in Arlington. But recently she downsized to a spick-and-span townhome community standing on the bluffs of Cityview. This perch overlooks a bird sanctuary, providing a dazzling sunset view and green space in an atmosphere of relative comfort. She and her friends share book reviews, bridge dinners at local restaurants, and potluck gatherings. Joy’s move seemed logical after the death of former HoFW Chairman Dick Trice in 2014. He and Joy had spent the last 5 years of his life together, starting when they met at Westside in 2009. The new location provides property maintenance and companionship with close humanist friends.

As an artist, Joy has a knack for visualizing exactly how she likes things to be, so she completely redesigned her new townhome’s interior, surrounding herself with things she loves—art, including her own paintings and her mother’s paintings and carefully selected furniture, all tidy and situated precisely down to the last piece. Order seems key to her life, along with education, the pursuit of knowledge, travel, society, politics, and American Humanist Association “Humanist Manifesto Three” which, during an interview in May, she said perfectly describes her belief system.

“Westside UU serves as my community of friends, and the humanist association as a group I share common values with—not beliefs necessarily, but values,” she said.

Key values she holds dear are rational thinking, science, and the sense that human life is inherently valuable without the presence of a superhuman power or a god.

Early Life

Joy’s early life helped build her can-do outlook and a willingness to accept and enjoy life as it is in the moment. She was born after the Great Depression in 1934 in Lindsey, OK, a tiny town she calls “the broomcorn capital of the world” with a population of less than 3,000. For those unfamiliar with broomcorn, it is a sorghum plant (sorghum vulgare var. technicum) used in broom making. The town had a broom factory in an area she describes as “the red, clay dust of south Oklahoma” near Norman. A small oil boom once added a few hundred people, but the town was never large.

The family moved around often during her early years. Her father was a teacher and later a professor, who traveled back and forth working at small consolidated schools in winter and completing his college degrees in summer. She was an only child until her brother was born when she was 11 years old. She describes him as “a wonderful brother” and an architectural historian living in Illinois today.

Her mother was an artist well-known in some circles. She painted and sold many paintings throughout her life.

“My dad was probably an atheist, but I don’t know. My mother was an accepting believer. Never did we read bible verses or discuss the bible,” she said. Officially they were members of the First United Methodist Church.

“The greatest gift my parents gave me was an interest in everything. I mean if you didn’t know a word, they got the dictionary out. If you didn’t know where something was, you got the globe out. I loved to read, and my mama took me by the hand to the library. They were not perfect parents, but the older you get the more you understand why,” she said.

They also instilled an interest in politics, which she always has enjoyed.

“I can remember as far back as Wilkie and Roosevelt listening to conventions on the little radio and my parents discussing it—my mother for Wilkie, my father for Roosevelt—so it was just always a part of my life, listening to conventions, and that was when conventions were really fun to listen to, and I felt like it was my duty. I was raised to think this was a responsibility to be proud of,” she said.

The family settled in Stillwater, OK.

Young Adult Life

After graduation from a Stillwater public high school, she attended Oklahoma A&M for 2 years, which today is Oklahoma State University (OSU). There she met Jay Lotven, her first husband, who has been an HoFW member since about 2007. She describes him as a wrestler and a cowboy, who rode in rodeos. He wore cowboy shirts and cowboy boots.

“We both were just little bitty, cute things. I weighed about 99, and he weighed about 110,” she said.

Despite struggles in their marital life, she is happy they have remained lifelong friends. She largely attributes this to their similar world views, including their political and humanist values. They were married 11 years and have two children, David and Laurie.

Joy’s first introduction to Unitarians was during this marriage when they briefly attended a Unitarian Church. They moved around for both work and education. She took odd jobs working for OSU in the Registrar’s Office and at oil and oil equipment companies.

After Jay finished his degrees, they left Houston and moved to New Orleans. She was shocked to discover that New Orleans public schools required her to sign an affidavit stating Laurie

had no black blood to gain admission into the New Orleans public school system in 1961. Eventually, she and Jay moved to Tulsa but, after continuing to have marital struggles, they divorced and the children stayed with her. She went back to OSU and completed her bachelor’s degree.

“We lived in a little gray-shingled house with a 25-gallon hot water tank, no car, and no washing machine,” which was not easy she recalls. She had to live close enough for both her and the children to walk to school.

After graduating, she taught 1 year in Stillwater public schools, and she and Jay tried marriage a second time, this time for the children. They were married 3 years before divorcing again. He moved to Arlington, TX to work for Vought. Later she also moved, completed her Master’s Degree in Denton, and taught 20 years for AISD.

Later Life

Jay met his wife, Suzie, and Joy met Woody within a year after the move.

“I feel fortunate that we both met two beautiful people,” Joy said.

She interviewed for her teaching job with Woody, who was AISD associate superintendent. Later, he became superintendent and was with the school district 47 years. At her interview, she learned that her records had not arrived in time to be hired for the year. Woody apologized and said he could not hire her without records.

“I said that is really a shame because you are going to pass up one of the best teachers you might have ever hired, and I really did say that, and he hired me on the spot,” she recalls.

They developed a lifelong romance and were married 32 years. As an elementary teacher for two decades, she served as president of the 2,000-member Texas State Teacher Association in Arlington, taught in-service teacher programs for 17 years, and wrote elementary school curriculum.

After retirement, she and a friend operated a private tutoring service for 4 years, and she delighted in teaching kindergartners for the first time. She also tutored students in Grades 1 - 7.

Throughout their marriage, she and Woody traveled extensively, going to Europe 8 or 10 times, to Russia, and a range of other countries. Her favorite trip was when they went to Europe for about 5 weeks with no reservations and carrying one small backpack each. They flew into Rome.

“We found a little pension with the windows open and no air conditioning, with men screaming and driving fast cars all night,” she laughs.

They rented a car and drove all over Italy to Venice, Milan, Florence, Naples, Pisa, Pompeii, and the Italian Alps. Then they traveled beyond to Lucerne Switzerland and Austria. Woody was 72 for this trip, and she was 18 years younger than him.

“I never thought about his age,” she said. “He was beautiful.”

From the Editor:

Most HoFW members favor science and rationalism over religion, magic, and dogma. Within that realm, we remain very diverse, however, with different perspectives in a world often unfriendly to secular thought. This column presents our stories.

Other trips took them to Germany, Calais, and England, including Bath, the Cotswolds, and Edinburgh, and to Spain and Scandinavia. One year before the wall came down, they were in Russia, which she found to be culturally stiff with awful food and service.

“It was very comradic,” she recalls. “Most of the women were still wearing uniforms and all of that.”

She did enjoy the circus there, which she said was more interesting than circuses in the U.S. because they “told a story rather than just being an act.”

St. Petersburg (Leningrad at the time) was completely different and cosmopolitan. She remembers getting lost in the Winter Palace. A small woman came to her holding a little bag and asked, “American?” When she said yes, the woman dug in her purse and handed her a piece of hard candy.

“We knew that something was happening. All over Europe people knew something was happening, but in America we didn’t really realize the wall was coming down as quickly as it was,” she said.

After 47 years, Woody retired finally and she remembers feeling that was the first time in her life she had him all to herself because he was so much a part of the school district. They moved to a lake in East Texas for 4 years until life’s next greatest challenge arrived. One day while filling a birdfeeder, Woody fell and broke all of the bones in his left foot. The doctor put him on a blood thinner, setting up a scenario that led to a stroke. When the stroke happened, paramedics needed 15 minutes to arrive and 15 minutes to get to the hospital. The damage was done.

Doctors put him into rehabilitation programs, and she went through classes to become his caregiver. She took care of Woody for the next 12 years until he died at the age of 90 in 2006.

They both wanted him at home. So she provided all of his care during his last years. He was unable to talk, stand, communicate, wash, or feed himself for a time. But she took care of him and made flash cards to help him regain his faculties, including the ability to count, sign his name, stand in a box, read the newspaper—which he did from cover to cover—and talk, although he had difficulty blending sounds. She remembers fondly that he would say, “It’s a bootiful world.”

Joy said she values this time because it enabled her to learn so much more about him than she ever would have known if life had always been good.

She joined HoFW and Westside UU in 2009, which she credits with helping her rebuild her life again after mourning his passing.

FFRF writes letter to NRH City Council to protest divisive, exclusionary prayers at official meetings

(continued from page 1)

gion Foundation (FFRF) also attended in support of the protest. Recently FFRF Attorney Sam Grover mailed an official letter to North Richland Hills Mayor Oscar Trevino reminding him of the unconstitutionality of his use of a Christian invocation to open all NRH City Council meetings. The letter stated, in part:

“Prayer at government meetings is unnecessary, inappropriate, and divisive. The best solution is to discontinue invocations altogether. Council members are free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way. They do not need to worship on taxpayers’ time. The Council’s current prayer practice excludes the over 23% of Americans who identify as non-religious, including more than one-in-three adult Americans under 30. (Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015 at <http://www.pewforum.org/>).

“Our nation is founded on a

godless Constitution, whose only references to religion in government are exclusionary, such as the clause prohibiting any religious test for public office (U.S. Constitution, Article VI). The framers of our Constitution did not find it necessary to pray during the 4-month Constitutional Convention. We fail to see why it is necessary, then, for the North Richland Hills City Council to pray at its meeting. In order to demonstrate the Council’s respect for the diverse range of religious and nonreligious citizens living in North Richland Hills, we urge you to concentrate on civil matters and leave religion to the private conscience of each individual by ending the practice of hosting prayers at your meetings. Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to resolve this matter.”

—Freedom From Religion Foundation, <http://ffrf.org>



A crowd gathers for the ribbon cutting and grand opening of the new NRH City Hall, which bears an “In God we Trust” sign. A woman on the back row looks toward protesters who brought signs voicing opposition to City policies that fail to acknowledge or abide by separation of church and state boundaries.

Photo by James Blase



Police stand around the protesters bearing signs, including one showing that NRH excludes people who are not Christian from government (right center). Another sign, right, states “In No God Do We Trust.” Photo by James Blase

The event was peaceful in that those present generally respected the rights accorded to each citizen to peaceably have their voices heard. A few comments were exchanged between protesters and other people at the ceremony, but discussions appeared to remain civil, which was confirmed by a NRH police officer, who asked to remain anonymous because he is not an authorized, official city spokesman. He said everyone remained calm despite the fact that a few words of disagreement were exchanged during the initial protest chant.

The officer also said police were given a Plan B for managing the event. They had been instructed to set aside a separate area for protestors quite a distance from the speaker’s podium to be used in case the situation failed to remain calm. That location was on the other side of the parking lot quite a distance away, but the Plan B move never was required. Throughout the event, protesters were allowed to remain immediately behind chairs that had been set up in front of the podium.

Little to no interaction occurred be-

tween protesters and attendees, although one participant did have a conversation with a couple of protestors, and he agreed to speak on the record using only the name Charlie, which showed his sense of humor given the fact that he appeared to be Vietnamese, that I was wearing a Vietnam Veteran’s hat, and the two of us are about the same age. “Charlie” was the nickname given to our enemy, the Viet Cong, during the Vietnam War.

“Charlie” said he is very much in favor of the freedoms we all have available to us in this country, and he agreed with the protesters that government and religion should not mix. He said he is a Buddhist, so I asked him to confirm my opinion that Buddhists are essentially atheists.

“Of course,” he said. “Buddha was an enlightened being, not a god, a man who had discovered a philosophy of life that helped people live a peaceful life free from suffering.”

Gesturing toward the podium he said, “I don’t understand how these people can believe in something no one can see or prove.”

German humanists and HoFW cooperate on international issues supported by the AHA and the IHEU

(continued from page 1)

contacted HoFW. This connection was made as a result of my personal visit with Schmid, his wife, family, and a friend and interpreter in summer 2015. We shared a meal, he interviewed me, and we made an agreement to stay in touch regarding our shared interests.

During and after this visit, he agreed to cooperate on humanist endeavors, including equality for all, ending religious strangleholds in government and society, legal infringements, and other aspects of both U.S. and German legal and social systems.

Like HoFW, Schmid and his organization support many causes that call attention to freedom of and from religion, protection of human rights, and public education regarding how those rights are infringed or denied on the basis of race, creed, color, sexual ori-

entation, and religion or nonreligion.

BFG is a member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) which emphasizes human rights abuses around the world, not just in Germany or the U.S. IHEU has ties to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council. One of its current initiatives involves sexual and reproductive rights of women in Paraguay. On June 23, the organization presented a written statement to the UN Human Rights Council regarding what it described as “the grave situation in the country for women and girls.”

In addition to participation in international governmental bodies, IHEU has some political clout in Germany, having had some members of German Parliament, the Bundestag, who are of humanist persuasion. The presence of this organization enables German students like the three preparing this peti-

tion to reach out and touch a like-minded group and find communication pathways open to their ideas, as they educate themselves.

During email exchanges with Hieber, we also were able to point her to the German online publication, *Telopolis*, which previously published articles about the AHA’s work in this area as far back as 2012. At that time, *Telopolis* reported that AHA staff member and political scientist Matthew Bulger was using 2012 election coverage to inform the public about the problems with these laws.

Bulger joined the AHA from the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law where he formulated policy papers on civil rights issues related to housing, employment, and voting rights. He interned in the offices of Senator Al Franken (D-MN) and Representative Travis Childers (D-MS).

Bulger is a graduate of American University in Washington D.C. and founder of the American University Rationalists and Atheists.

The *Telopolis* article cited references to Arkansas Constitution, Article 19, Section 1; Mississippi Constitution, Article 14, Section 265; Tennessee Constitution, Article 9, Section 2; North Carolina Constitution, Article 6, Section 8; and South Carolina Constitution, Article 17, Paragraph 4). The Texas Constitution has Article 1, Section 4, which eliminates religious tests to run for office with one exception: “provided he acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being.”

Locally MA President Elizabeth Tarrant, candidate for Texas House District 97, faced this law when she filed her candidacy forms. Although she is an atheist, she was encouraged to use the word humanist to avoid obstacles.

Study 2 says leaving a church can be as challenging as firefighters and police leaving a job

By Wanda Foster

(This article is the second in a two-part series documenting results of a Texas Christian University (TCU) professor's study of challenges faced by those who leave religions.)

Study 2, the second of TCU Associate Professor's Amorette Hinderaker's dissertation studies of people leaving religion, expanded the scope of research in response to the findings of Study 1, which concentrated on people leaving the Church of Latter Day Saints, also known as the Mormon Church.

That study found that any person leaving the religion, or possibly any life-consuming or totalistic faith similar to it, risk long-lasting, permanent loss of important things in their lives—family, friends, marriages, jobs, and entire support systems—through shunning and even divorce.

People left the church with great difficulty and sometimes were barely able to extract themselves from it despite trying for decades. For those who succeeded, fear of loss often translated into actual loss after they expressed their true beliefs and left.

Reasons for leaving the church were discussed in the previous article and were highly personal and varied. In many cases, such reasons involved personal situations, observations of problems and inconsistencies between doctrine or beliefs and realities inside and outside the church.

One woman was looking for a husband and kept praying to god, but he failed to her request.

She wrote: "I made bargains with the Lord promising to do things if he would send me my one and only."

The woman kept praying and praying.

She wrote that she thought perhaps she "had done something so horrible that god had already relegated me to outer darkness [the Mormon version of hell]."

Hinderaker, herself a former Mormon, said "that is Mormonism. What do you do?"

When clergy were consulted with issues, many of the 50 study participants found clergy to be less than interested and frequently unwilling to accept or provide a forum for discussing either dissent or the actual needs of the person. This response left the church member isolated, confused, and suffering from loss of confidence and self-esteem.

Fears of many of the participants came true. In 28 of the study narratives, participants reported being rejected by family and friends and experiencing discord in the family.

One woman, Paula, wrote: "I have lost all of my Mormon friends. Some of them lied to me and said they would still my friends, but that wasn't true."

After evaluating study findings and the extent of loss or trauma, Hinderaker decided to conduct the Study 2 by comparing the plight of people leaving religions to the problems faced by

police, firefighters, and soldiers, who are in life-consuming, totalistic-style work organizations they are trying to leave.

Study 2: Comparison of Leaving a Church to Leaving Police, Firefighter, and Soldier Organizations

Study 2 contained 200 pages and a completely different sample of 50 Mormons, whose responses to questions were compared to those of people trying to leave totalistic, life-consuming work organizations, including a group of police, firefighters, and soldiers trying to leave their professions or jobs.

Study results revealed similar outcomes for Mormons, police, firefighters, and soldiers trying to leave their organizations. Respondents on both sides reported experiencing the same types of in-and-out exit processes, obstacles, and long arduous journeys before separation could be achieved, either from a profession or a church. Most of them reported suffering alone because no one would allow them a way to express their dissent openly.

Behaviors for leaving the profession or the church were similar. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for police and firefighters often was an unvoiced catalyst for wanting to leave. Many underwent long internal struggles before leaving.

While Mormon study participants may or may not have suffered PTSD, they were traumatized by fear of losing their support systems when they left the church or of losing their eternal souls, and it took many years or decades to leave.

The three core elements of the study were pre-exit behaviors, which is the time before the person actually leaves a church or profession; exit behaviors, the longest process which involves preparing to leave and moving toward leaving the church, and post-exit behaviors after they left the church.

The second set of Mormons, these residents of South Dakota rather than Utah, was very similar to the first set in that they also experienced prolonged periods of masking their true beliefs and grappling with the idea of whether or not or how to leave the Mormon Church.

The study also showed that people leaving high-reliability organizations (HROs), such as police and firefighters, experienced these same prolonged periods of self-doubt, isolation, and inability to voice their dissent or their needs because of the cultural unacceptability of doing so.

In the same way that Mormons spent a great deal of their lives doing the work of the church at church, at home with their families, and in their communities or even sometimes in their jobs (as discussed in Study 1 and also supported in Study 2), HROs often had their entire social fabric tied up in the hierarchy and work of their organizations.

Hinderaker said that pre-exit experiences of HRO personnel were similar to those experienced by some Mor-

mons, such as deaths in the family and other life-changing, catalytic events that caused them to change their minds about the church. HRO personnel also experienced traumas that affected their feelings about their work.

One police officer wrote, "Death never really bothered me. I could eat a ham sandwich and process a suicide at the same time."

That was not the catalytic event however. His trauma occurred when he went to the scene of a 7-year-old and watched the child die. Paramedics tried to resuscitate him, but their efforts proved futile. The man wrote that he just could not handle it any more. He lost control.

"Once the tears started I couldn't stop them," he said. I just had to leave the job."

So he went through a year-long process of leaving his job.

Another wrote about a major airplane crash that required him to help pull bodies out of the Potomac at 5 a.m.

Many reported physical injuries or violent threats as catalysts, while others were affected by causing bodily harm to another human. These are common experiences that led them to want to leave the HRO.

One man recalled having a man beat him with his own pistol across the back.

"I shot him in the head 3 times," he wrote. "After that I left the job. I had had enough."

The problem often arose with the actual process of exiting rather than with the decision to leave.

Much like the masks Mormons wore to conceal the fact that they were thinking of leaving, HRO personnel in many cases try to cover their true feelings. Those in the study said they would not discuss traumatic experiences and needs with others or seek counseling, fearing they would jeopardize their jobs if they admitted weakness.

Similar traumatic experiences or losses were reported by Mormons in the church exit process.

One person describes the death of a 4-year-old child as the beginning of loss of faith in doctrine. Another one talks about losing her husband and learning that the church would not allow his closest friend to speak at the funeral because he had been excommunicated from the church a year earlier.

After that, she questioned staying. Another person asked her bishop about an issue which she felt he should have felt some remorse or guilt about some things that were happening at the time, but the bishop displayed neither of those, so she left.

Both churchgoers and HROs faced administrative hurdles and problems before they could truly leave their churches or professions.

One HRO respondent wrote, "It is not the public that makes this job so degrading. It is the administration."

Respondents discussed higher officials viewed to be corrupt, bad role models, or exhibitors of unethical practices as they performed their duties. Similarly people in the Mormon church reported disenchantment with clergy. When they spoke with clergy about a problem, the response seemed to be poorly handled.

One Mormon describes repeated beatings she received from her husband, at one point even being hospitalized as a result, but the church opposes divorce.

She went to a bishop in the church for help. In her narrative, she uses the term former spousal unit or FSU to describe the spouse.

"His advice was go home and make FSU a cherry pie. That will make it up to him," she wrote. "He told me to pray hard, and he asked what did you do to make him have to beat you?"

Another member left the church after his bishop asked him and his family to stop attending services or to sit in the back because his disabled son disrupted the other members. The study participant said he "denies the idea that a god like that even existed that would deny that child."

These people no longer trusted church clergy to have their best interests in mind. Disillusionment and disbelief began to grow and with them doubts about church doctrine increased.

HRO personnel also began to doubt leadership and after bad experiences with administration.

One HRO participant wrote: "I spent 15 years of my life dealing with human garbage. The first 5 years or so I felt good about it, about who I was and what I was doing. Then I realized that I am really just some sort of social janitor, you know, the ones at the supermarket. Hey, Bob, Bob, Aisle 5."

As in the Mormon church, people leaving HROs tended to have family issues tied up in their personal decisions to leave their jobs. Sometimes multiple families were involved because HRO families often socialize primarily with other HRO families because they share a better mutual understanding of the life-style and its high demands than people outside of these professions. Each family supports the other, and children play and associate with other children in the same groups.

Police officers talked about the difficulty of maintaining a family life when people are on call constantly, and they become fearful of how family and friends will react when they quit their jobs.

One wrote: "What if I just quit now? I have been telling my kids for years just to suck it up. So what does it say if I just quit?"

Some reported staying in their jobs for their families.

Pre-exit and exit behaviors did not always occur chronologically in either case. After deciding to leave their jobs or their Mormon churches, either

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Many Protestant and Catholic churches make dissent and free exercise of freedoms difficult

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group sometimes reverted to previous efforts to stay in and avoid the pain or loss associated with leaving.

Many HRO personnel looked online for answers in anonymous chat rooms or bulletin boards, where they would ask other police and firefighters “hey, what keeps you in this job?”

Another said, “I am looking for reasons here.”

One participant said, “I don’t want to be one of those 8 to 5 stiffs.”

Another one talked about his family and about fellow officers and firefighters as brothers.

In fact, 48 of the 50 showed the totalistic and life-consuming social fabric of their organizations by referring to their fellow officers as brothers or the brotherhood and not wanting to leave them behind, stating that leaving was “to leave the brotherhood or leave my brother behind.”

Hinderaker said even if someone in the department “gets on your last nerve you don’t leave because they are your family.”

Likewise church members repeatedly sought reasons to stay. Hinderaker said much of the often lengthy pre-exit and exit process occurred because the people feared the consequences of leaving friends and family relationships important to their support system. In the case of church members, they also reported fearing loss or risk of losing their eternal souls.

This is particularly true in the Mormon faith where spousal relationships are considered eternal and where leaving the church is considered the equivalent of excommunication and eternal condemnation. All of these factors caused lengthy exit processes and sometimes years of frustration and anguish on the parts of those leaving the Mormon church or an HRO.

One female participant in the study summarized the problem by saying that the repeated in-and-out process took her 10 years to complete before she could leave the church. She was so busy trying to decide what might happen to her eternal soul if she left.

“What if they were right?” the woman asked. “I was motivated by the church because I kept questioning what if they were right? I was motivated by how long you would be dead versus how long you will be alive and considering the turmoil there.”

Hinderaker describes the back and forth process of leaving as testing the waters before the actual exit.

People in the HRO group also tested the waters before stepping out. For a while, many of them said they compartmentalized their job responsibilities, dividing them between essential and nonessential functions. Then they reduced the effort they applied to tasks determined to be nonessential.

One police officer described a deterioration of his work. He began doing less and less and tried to rationalize why he was there. But after that he

began to realize the inherent danger when a fellow officer told him “you are trying to commit suicide by criminal.”

At that point he decided he was endangering others as well as himself, which was not an option.

Various first steps of exit or other options exist for some HROs. Some choose to go to a different job in the same field, such as going from SWAT to becoming a school officer.

As Mormons test the waters, they may also seek a middle ground.

One participant wrote, “I stopped paying my tithing just to see if god instantly would strike me dead. He didn’t.”

Hinderaker said her favorite was the woman who tested the waters by defying the church’s ban on caffeine drinks.

“First I stopped attending Sunday School, but then my best friend started to notice, so then I’d slip off to Barnes and Noble for a strong double shot mocha right before I would go to church.”

Then she would go to a church meeting with “a fistful of Altoids to cover the smell.”

Testing the waters helped the Mormons lose their self-doubt and fear of being struck down. HRO participants tested the waters to overcome their self-doubt and fears also, many of which arose from the fear of separating themselves from the coworkers they considered to be their brothers.

They tended not to joke about leaving their jobs. Some felt guilty because they felt many others would “kill” to have the job they had, and they felt guilty for hating it.

Also they doubted their fitness to do other work.

One said, “I am not qualified. I am not fit for another career. After this, what could I possibly do? I’ve seen too much.”

Thirty of the 50 HRO study participants used the term “suck it up” to describe how they concealed or repressed their emotions and doubts as a police officer or firefighter.

Hinderaker said that if these people expressed any emotions, others would tell them to “suck it up, grow up, or get yourself a can of man and a straw and suck it up.” So they concealed their desires to exit, much like church members preparing to exit hid behind the mask.

The final exit process was different than the process of leaving less consuming organizations, including churches or careers where people give 2 weeks notice and leave, Hinderaker said. By the time people actually left, over a period of years they had already severed many of the ties that bound them. A final announcement would be made, and the people would leave either the church or the HRO forever.

Also, the post-exit period, for HROs was very similar to the Mormon post-

exit period described in Study 1.

“We saw the same thing here—wailing, shrieking mothers and wives, friends who left them, being disinvited from things,” Hinderaker said.

Study 3: Other Religions and the Freedom to Express Dissent

Study 3 completed recently in the spring of 2016 was conducted separately from the dissertation and was performed with the help of Hinderaker’s colleague, TCU Assistant Professor Johny Garner, Ph.D., who specializes in organizational communication.

This study veered away from Mormonism and toward other churches. It evaluated the freedom of church members to leave the church or to express dissent inside their churches.

Hinderaker said they questioned if or how the participant was able to express dissent during the process of exit and if dissent was in fact silenced. The study also tried to determine if the person inside other religions had freedom to speak up.

“What we found was that, no, they did not have the freedom to speak up,” she said.

Various Christian religions were studied. Many findings in those churches also showed long struggles with a decision to leave the church. People in the churches took as little as 6 months or as long as 6 years to finally leave.

Reasons cited for leaving were similar to those in the previous studies, such as problems with clergy who were authoritarian and turned people away from the church. Hinderaker said one participant in the third study talked about problems with things preached from the pulpit and facing disagreement from him when she raised the subject. She left the church.

Authoritarian leadership was a common reason that “turned people off,” she said. A participant known only as Ben took issue with his clergy for pushing a new curriculum from the pulpit. He said the response was “one of those things where you are either with us or against us, and if you are not with us you are the one doing something wrong because this is the right way to do it. When I hear that, I get a little nervous twitch,” he said.

So he was unable to address that concern with the pastor of that church and eventually left the church.

A woman in the study said she had belonged to three different churches. She had left two of them and was getting ready to leave the third, so she was in and out of churches all of her life to that point. The first one, the Pentecostal church of her youth, practiced laying on of hands in ceremonies and displayed emotional, dramatic public behaviors she did not like.

“I just didn’t feel it,” she said.

Another participant discussed a church that opposed having women in the clergy. When a woman had attempted to be pastor, they turned her away based on her gender. At that point, he questioned the authoritarian nature of the church and left.

Hinderaker said people in the study came from several different Christian faiths, both Protestant and Catholic. No Mormons were included.

Two of the churches were fundamentalist Baptist and other churches with strict social and cultural beliefs that were significant to church leadership. For women, dress codes were a big thing, Hinderaker said.

One woman, Vicki (not her real name), talked about being chastised for the length of her skirt.

She said, “Is this what god wants us to look like? Does god want us to be this ugly? It just didn’t make sense. We’re supposed to take care of ourselves.”

Rodney left because the church would only permit him to listen to Christian music. Another person left because he felt the music his church allowed was too liberal because they added drums and bass guitars, so he left his church.

Hinderaker said educational restrictions were a big, big cultural restriction that made people leave—things like requiring Bible college or home schooling and not encouraging college. One participant decided to leave his religion immediately after college because he felt that he had no quality of life.

“I didn’t feel like I wanted to go into the ministry full time, and that is all this degree is good for. It is not even accredited,” he said.

He left the church, and his family disowned him.

Like the Mormons and the HROs, these people searched for reasons to stay in all of the churches, but in each case they faced problems such as fear of losing family and friends.

Wendy talked about being involved with her whole family. Her father was a minister in this church, and she said “Honestly I don’t even know a word for it because in that religion your whole life is the church. You don’t have friends at work. You don’t have friends from school because you are homeschooled and because work in the church so your whole school and your whole life, your whole being is the church, so once you leave, they shun you.”

Another person discussed fears of losing his wife if he left because he joined the church with her when their marriage was struggling.

Carl discussed his reluctance to even discuss his disbelief in doctrine because of his fiancé. “There are a lot of things we just don’t talk about because it just irritates. There is friction there I guess,” he said.

He describes the tension involved in thinking about having a family because she would want to bring up the children in the church, and he would not want that.

While people have freedom of religion under the constitution, the ultimate finding of this study is that church members, in practice, face religious and social restrictions that discourage them from exercising their freedoms or voicing dissent.