

# July 2018 Newsletter of the Lake Superior Freethinkers

George Erickson, editor - [tundracub@mediacombb.net](mailto:tundracub@mediacombb.net)

**First Sunday - Radisson Hotel –**

**9:00 AM Social – 9:30 Breakfast - 10:00 Presentation**

Facilitators: David Broman - 349-7455, Bill Guse - 834-4583, 343-4806

**July 1 program**

**Dr. David Swenson of St Scholastica College**

will speak about conspiracy theories: why some people thrive on them but others call them absurd. Dr Swenson is an expert on the psychology of unusual people.

\* \* \*

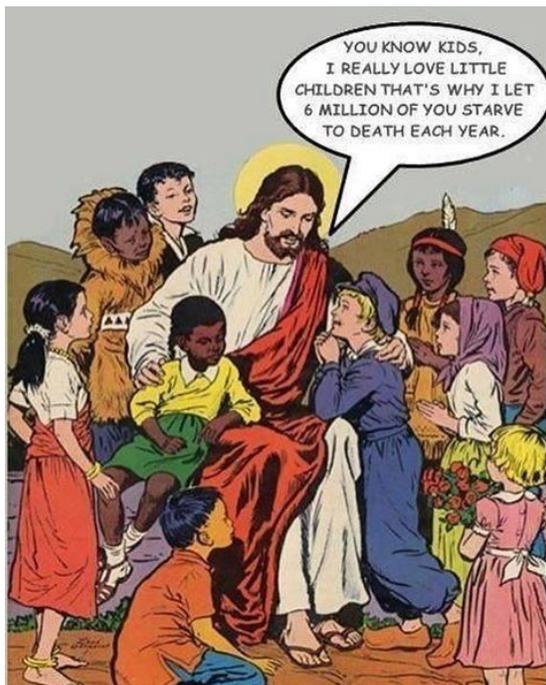
**The Freedom From Religion Foundation is again attempting to reverse discriminatory tax benefits for clergy.**

FFRF, a national state/church watchdog with 33,000 non-religious members, has [filed a brief](#) before the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in a replay of a case the court last ruled on in 2014.

The Department of Treasury and Internal Revenue Service, who are the named defendants, have appealed FFRF's major court victory before a district court, which last year ruled for a second time in favor of FFRF's challenge of a housing allowance provision in the tax code that uniquely privileges clergy.

At issue is the constitutionality of a provision in the tax code that excludes from gross income housing allowances paid to "ministers of the gospel." The clergy allowance is an outright exemption, not a mere tax deduction — allowing housing allowances paid as part of clergy salary to be subtracted from their taxable income.

The value of the exemption is enormous, amounting to \$700 million a year in lost revenue. Religion News Service calculated the allowance increases the take-home pay of some pastors by up to 10%.



## Memo to All Men by columnist Ed Raymond

The #Me Too movement is sweeping the world. Thousands of women in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales marched through cities in May 2018 celebrating getting the vote 100 years ago. Irish women were responsible for passing same-sex marriage and repealing laws against divorce and abortion in the last decade.

Although men are dominant in the American Southern Baptist Convention Church, thousands of protesting women drove male leadership to resign recently because of sex scandals and elected new leadership. Catholic women have also been protesting their lowly status in the church and the fact they cannot be ordained as priests. The Vatican has already lost Europe.

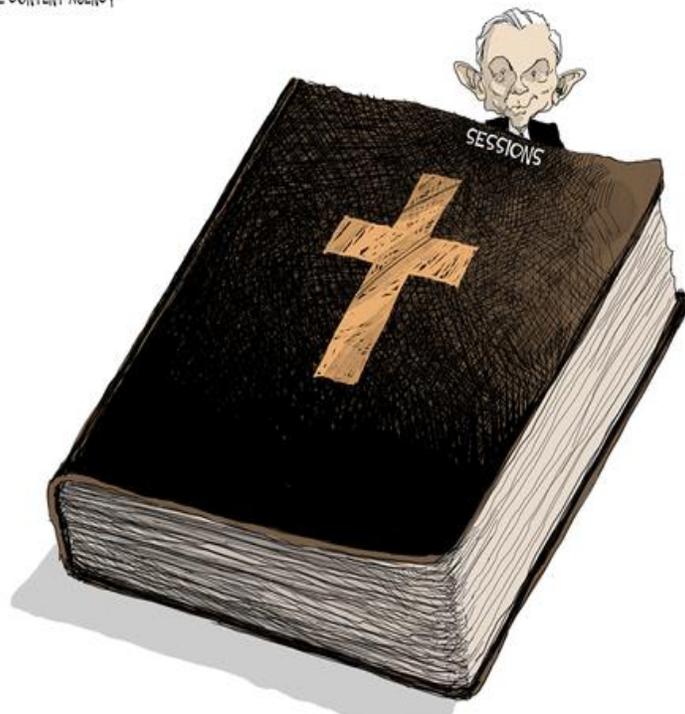
When “Catholic” Warsaw in “Catholic” Poland has 45,000 people marching and celebrating in a Gay Pride parade in 2018, that’s more than a message in Pope John II land. It’s a demand. (Ed, who writes for the Duluth Weekly Reader and other publications, is always worth reading - and he is very tough on the churches.)

### BBC NEWS

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions has been criticized for citing Bible scripture to back up the Trump administration's immigration policy. At an event in Indiana, Mr Sessions defended the practice of separating undocumented immigrant families apprehended at the border by quoting the New Testament.

**The same Bible verse was once used to justify US slavery.**

SHENEMAN TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY



“ONE ADVANTAGE OF MY DIMINUTIVE STATURE IS IT MAKES IT EASIER TO HIDE MY DESPICABLE BEHAVIOR BEHIND THE BIBLE.”

## **Project Blitz: the legislative assault by Christian nationalists to reshape America** The Guardian – David Taylor

Since Donald Trump became president, rightwing groups are helping flood state legislatures with bills that promote hardline Christian conservative views. In Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Louisiana and Tennessee so-called ‘In God We Trust’ bills have become law since 2017.

The emboldened religious right has unleashed a wave of legislation across the United States since Donald Trump became president, as part of an organized bid to impose hardline Christian values across American society.

Some legislation uses verbatim language from the “model bills” created by a group called the [Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation](#) (CPCF), set up by a former Republican congressman which has a stated aim to “protect religious freedom, preserve America’s Judeo-Christian heritage and promote prayer”.

At least 75 bills have been introduced in more than 20 states during 2017-18 which appear to have similar objectives to the playbook, according to [Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#), a campaign group which tracks legislation that undermines the principle of separation of church and state.

Opponents warn that the CPCF (which claims more than 600 politicians as members across state legislatures) is using the banner of “religious freedom” to impose [Christianity](#) on American public, political and cultural life.

Part of the strategy is to pave the way for later political attacks, painting an election opponent as “anti-faith”. Recent attacks on a Minnesota Democratic politician by Republican opponents followed exactly those lines.

• \* \*

**With government help, destitute pastors won’t need to plead for basic transportation any more – see below.**

