Fifteen years ago this month, two North Texas families came together to pull off a tremendous achievement and organizational experiment. They had been told by leading secular thinkers that building a church for freethinkers was a bad idea, that it was an empty effort, and that it wouldn’t be of any value to true freethinkers.

Fifteen years later, we see that the results have been positive; in continuous operation since our founding, we’ve seen marriages and births, sickness and tragedy, all while affirming the value of a freethinking worldview as sufficient for living a good life. We’ve also seen a sister church form in Houston, and are receiving constant requests from individuals throughout the country for information on founding a Church of Freethought in their own hometown.

The most important element of starting a Church of Freethought is the commitment to actually create a church. This means a service commitment from the outset focusing on the needs of unbelievers – people who suppose that they are really without a religion – in coming to grips with their atheism and their important place as atheists in the larger society.

Too many unbelievers assume falsely that they are religious ciphers just because they lack any belief in god(s) when, in fact, many of them have very strong opinions on “religious” and moral questions which they have arrived at through reading, study, and thought. Too many unbelievers also falsely assume that their views are unique and peculiar, while the truth is that atheists frequently agree on a wider range of issues than do the many different kinds of believers in god(s). And too many would-be freethinkers are wasting their time in the churches of the faith-based religions, stifling their doubts and misgivings, unsure of or afraid of where such religious skepticism would lead them anyway, and looking in theological doctrines for what is not there and trying to fit in where they will never belong. All these individuals, and their families, are the people who need a Church of Freethought. It is their needs that drive what a Church of Freethought is and ought to be.

Founding a Church of Freethought also means a determination to maintain the integrity of a set of principles and beliefs – yes, beliefs! – that are part of a consistent philosophy or ideology of Freethought, even when well-meaning participants and supporters would like to introduce other ideas and objectives. There is no need for another “anything goes” religious organization since many already exist. In the United States, for example, this role is already aptly filled for most people by the Unitarian-Universalists, a sect which is essentially the ultimate endpoint of liberal monotheistic Judeo-Christianity.

At the same time, there is a sense in which the meaning and the message of a Church of Freethought must remain general. For a church is not a special interest club for ethnic activists, environmentalists, world peace promoters, or social justice advocates. It is not a political action committee of either the left or the right. Nor is it merely a social group that must avoid all of the

BLOOD DRIVE TODAY

NTCOF Member John Hendricks generously donates the gift of life, contributing his atheist freethinking blood to save the lives of his fellow North Texans. If you’re able, please visit the Carter BloodCare vehicle outside Jason’s Deli today immediately after the service.
FREETHINKERS IN LOVE

by Brad and Ginger Watson

Dr. Zach asked Ginger and me if we might have something to say about romantic love from a freethought perspective, to include in the Bulletin this month. So my dear wife and I talked about it over spicy Mexican food, while starring longingly into each other’s eyes. And as the pace of our chips and salsa eating grew faster and faster, and all the while things were getting hotter and hotter, we decided we did, in fact, have something to say.

We say that we think romantic love requires physical affection and frequent, open communication to survive and flourish. And so lovers should be protective of their private time, which often comes at a premium in our busy lives. We can’t help but wonder about those couples who attend a theistic church every week, sometimes several times per week. We wonder if they are so wrapped up in their “relationships” with a god that they lose sight of the importance of their relationship with each other. Or maybe these fervent “relationships” with their deity could be an intentional creation, serving to purposefully reduce the amount of private time available to the couple? Is such a romance in trouble? Is it a case of, “I sure am glad I love my god so much because I sure can’t stand my lover?”

When Brad and Ginger Watson first met through the NTCOF Secular Singles group, they discovered that they had a lot more in common than just freethought, such as an appreciation for fine art, architecture, and the 18th century (of which the latter became their wedding theme).

most interesting and most important questions of human existence in order to avoid anyone’s feelings being hurt.

Like any other church, we define and develop ourselves through our regular services. But, like any other church that would be successful, the regular services of a Church of Freethought need to offer something worthwhile to its members. In fact, freethinkers must be offered something a good deal more than the monotonous mind-numbing fare offered by the faith-based churches.

But a Church of Freethought must nevertheless offer a performance, which is to say, a dramatic and appealing program of persuasion and demonstration on behalf of freethought. The regular services of the NTCOF have taken the form of variety presentations including two or more of the elements of music, readings, humorous and theatrical material, and accessible lectures on religious and philosophical questions relating to everyday life that are recognizable as “sermons.” Much of this material, or examples of it, have been made available at www.churchoffreethought.org. As a matter of small tradition, our services have also been thematically arranged, partly to help give each program some coherence, but also to give church members some idea of what to expect as well as providing a means for promotion.

Most importantly, a good Church of Freethought service should appeal to what is best in people. The gratuitous disparagement of faith-based religion, or “bashing,” should be avoided. This does not mean that the seriously-intended ideas of other religions ought not to be mentioned or analyzed. They will often have to be. But this can be done in a responsible way that demonstrates that freethinkers’ objections to superstitious doctrines and dogmas is rooted in facts and reason and is not simple animosity. Freethinkers, no less than believers in faith-based religions, are susceptible to contemptible and uncharitable ways of thinking and feeling if they are encouraged in such directions.

The purpose of a Church of Freethought is to encourage habits of mind that are exactly the opposite.

THINK ABOUT IT!
BOOK REVIEW: ESCAPE

Escape is a dramatic first-person account of life inside an ultra-fundamentalist American religious sect, and one woman's courageous flight to freedom with her eight children.

Carolyn Jessop was forced into an arranged marriage with a strange man thirty-two years older than her, who already had three wives. This arrangement is common in the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), the radical offshoot of the Mormon Church that had settled in small communities along the Arizona-Utah border. Over the next fifteen years, Carolyn had eight children and withstood her husband's psychological abuse and the watchful eyes of his other wives who were locked in a constant battle for supremacy... until she escaped.

NTCOF Member Erin Taylor will be reviewing this book during today’s service, and her review will also be published to our website along with links to Escape through Amazon.com, where your purchase can help support the NTCOF.

After reading it, please log onto our website and share your thoughts on our forum, which provides a place for book reviews and other engaging discussions.

JANUARY FORUM CHATTER

The following is a sampling of the ongoing discussions held at the NTCOF forum through the past month- log on to add your two cents!

eclectation: “...I personally found the last two [services] that I went to, the one in September, and the one this January intellectually stimulating. They might have seemed like a college lecture, but I personally like that style. However, while, I am skeptical about religion, I am still a quasi regular at a theist church.”

SlackMaster: “As an atheist I have a very strong aversion [to] sitting there quietly listening to a lecture about what to believe or not believe. I would much rather have had the chairs in a circle, involved, discussing and debating issues, current events, politics, etc. This would have been VERY appealing to me.”

texarkandy: “Personally, I’m quite the advocate of the Freethought movement - but not too impressed with the secular Humanist movement. I absolutely hate it when they are considered to be one & the same. Self-described Humanists seem to be as bad as theists about assuming that you (as a self-described Freethinker) share 90% of their sociopolitical views.”

KierH: “Atheist bus advertisements are being run in many cities; a movement started by the British comic, Ariane Sherine. Her bus slogan is, ‘There is probably no god, now stop worrying and enjoy your life.’ Two questions: 1) What slogans would NTCOF members like to see on the side of a bus? Any ideas? 2) Has a movement been started to get Dallas/Fort Worth into the bus sign action?”

pastortim: “We have had several deaths over the years. ... In one case the body was donated to the medical school and there was no service. In another couple of cases the family was not connected with the NTCOF and so no such help was asked for or would have been welcomed. BUT the next time may be different. Also, we should be on the lookout for any of our members who are in need of help even if not’s a death. David Burgess had heart surgery yesterday. He was doing Ok when I talked to Cara. But maybe when he gets home the family would appreciate some help of some kind. I will ask when next I talk to Cara if one of the rest of you doesn’t beat me to it.”

find more at:
www.churchoffreethought.org/bb
**FEBRUARY EVENTS**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or through our Meetup.com site. Please check these locations regularly, and RSVP through Meetup.

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and friendly discussion at Jason’s Deli in Irving, located just south of I-635 on MacArthur, at 7770 N. MacArthur Blvd., phone (972) 432-0555. Easy driving directions: To reach Jason’s from the Holiday Inn: turn RIGHT out of the parking lot onto Esters Blvd., RIGHT onto Freeport Parkway, RIGHT to enter I-635 EAST. Exit I-635 at MacArthur Blvd., then RIGHT onto MacArthur, and RIGHT again just ahead into the Jason’s parking lot.

**Board Game Night:** The NTCOF Board Game group meets nearly every Friday night at the smoke-free IHOP at 2310 Stemmons Trail in Dallas. The IHOP is adjacent to the Radisson Hotel along North-west Highway, about a ½ mile east of Loop 12.

**Secular Singles:** The Freethinking NTCOF Singles meets at the Vineyard restaurant in the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine (1800 Highway 26 East).

**Highway Cleanup:** We’ll be hitting the streets again on Saturday, February 28th, at 9:00AM in the Dillard’s parking lot at North Park Mall. Bring your walking shoes and warm clothes!

**Homebrew Club:** The first batch will be done, so we’ll get to enjoy a crisp new German Bock. This month, we’ll stay in Germany but try out a Roggenbier recipe. Meet at 12:00PM at Zachary Moore’s house on Saturday, February 28th.

**Video Game Night:** For those of you that want to indulge your affinity for blowing up aliens, illegal street racing, or portly Italian plumbers, the Video Game Night is for you! This month, we’re meeting at Zachary Moore’s house on Saturday, February 28th, at 6:00PM.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Folks, you hear this over and over, but it’s true: Freethought is NOT Free! Our continued growth is only possible through your generous donations and contributions to the church- our success depends on the commitment of ALL our members. We’ll share a more detailed financial summary later in the year, but here’s a snapshot of our financial activity from the past month:

- **Total Income:** $1,436.38
- **Total Expenses:** $1,340.43
- **Difference:** +$95.95

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**NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON AT UTA**

Neil deGrasse Tyson serves as Director of the Hayden Planetarium in New York City, and is a celebrated popular science writer, whose latest book is the playful and informative *Death by Black Hole: And Other Cosmic Quandaries*, which was a New York Times bestseller. Dr. Tyson is better known to the public as the host of PBS’ Nova’s spinoff program ScienceNow, as well as his numerous television appearances including multiple occasions on the Colbert Report:

Dr. Tyson will be leading a conversation on “The Cosmic Perspective: how the astrophysicist views life, the universe and everything,” at the University of Texas at Arlington as part of their Maverick Speaker Series-on Tuesday, February 17th, from 8:00 PM until 10:00 PM at the Texas Hall on 701 Nedderman Drive in Arlington. Be sure to reserve your (free) tickets as soon as possible through the UTA website!

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**The North Texas Church of Freethought**

A Rational Approach to Religion

- **Tim Gorski,** MD  
  Pastoral Director
- **Zachary Moore,** PhD  
  Executive Director
- **Deborah Boak**  
  Youth Director
- **Cash Foley**  
  Outreach Director
- **Georgene Harkness,** CPA  
  Treasurer
- **Howard Harkness**  
  Musical Director
- **Don Lewellyn**  
  Operations Director
- **Brad Watson**  
  Social Director

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