

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 • MADISON, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • WWW.FFRF.ORG

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SENT BY MAIL AND EMAIL to Jeffrey.Blackwell@cincinnati-oh.gov

Mr. Jeffrey Blackwell
Chief, Cincinnati Police Department
310 Ezzard Charles Drive
Cincinnati, OH 45214

Re: Cincinnati Police Department sponsoring prayer walks to lower crime

Dear Chief Blackwell:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation ("FFRF") and our local members who object to the Cincinnati Police Department calling for prayer walks to help fight crime. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization, which works to protect the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. FFRF represents nearly 20,000 members across the country including more than 500 members in Ohio.

We understand that the Cincinnati Police Department has teamed up with local churches to organize, host, and participate in "prayer walks." We understand that the goal of these walks is "to end violence through prayer."¹ We understand that religious congregations participated, but that "they were joined by members of the Cincinnati Police Department, which helped come up with the initiative."² Apparently "Police officials and church leaders have mutually extended an invitation . . ." These walks will continue every Saturday until Nov. 16.³

Calling upon citizens to pray is coercive and beyond the authority of any government, let alone a law enforcement arm of the government. Citizens should not be made to feel offended, excluded, or like political outsiders because the police department they support with their taxes imposes religious ritual on them. Put simply, your office is misusing its secular power to call for religious rituals and exhort citizens, regardless of beliefs, to participate in prayer.

It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that the government cannot in any way promote, advance, or otherwise endorse religion. The Supreme Court has said, "The touchstone for our analysis is the principle that the 'First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.'" *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005), (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Board of Ed. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985)).

The CPD's overt promotion of religion using official titles and public offices gives the unfortunate impression that the city supports and endorses particular religious rituals. The government is

¹ Ally Marotti, "Churches partner with police to end violence through prayer," *Cincinnati.com* (10/4/2013) available at <http://news.cincinnati.com/article/20131004/NEWS/310040173/Churches-partner-police-end-violence-through-prayer>.

² Available at <http://www.wcpo.com/web/wcpo/news/local-news/hamilton-county/cincinnati/over-the-rhine/church-members-cincinnati-police-take-to-streets-to-march-and-pray-for-peace>

³ *Id.*

sending the message “to nonadherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members...” *Id.* (citations omitted). “This presents a problem for the Sheriff because the Establishment Clause prohibits the government from ‘promot[ing] or affiliat[ing] itself with any religious doctrine or organization.’” *Milwaukee Deputy Sheriffs’ Ass’n v. Clarke*, 588 F.3d 523, 528 (7th Cir. 2009).

One of the CPD’s core values is “diversity, Our members recognize differences as a strength in our organization and community.” But hosting prayer events alienates a substantial portion of your community. Prayers exclude the 19% of the American population that is nonreligious.⁴ Not only are 1-in-5 Americans nonreligious, younger Americans are the least religious population in the country: 1-in-3 Americans aged 18-29 are not religious.⁵ While the events claim to welcome nonbelievers, it cannot be seriously contended that events centering on prayer are welcoming to those who do not believe in the efficacy of prayer.

Prayer will not lower crime

Apparently, the CPD believes prayer walks will lower crime. The walks themselves may lower crime simply by having crowds on the streets, but that is not because of the power of prayer — it is the power of people. It is troubling to see people congratulate themselves for praying, instead of taking meaningful action, such as regularly patrolling the streets. The members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation believe that nothing fails like prayer. Prayer is the ultimate cop-out, the ultimate admission that the invoker is giving up, is transferring personal responsibility to an imaginary being.

Prayer cannot stop violence. Significantly, scientific studies⁶ show that societies with less prayer have less violence:

“Murder rates are actually lower in more secular nations and higher in more religious nations where belief in God is deep and widespread. And within America, the states with the highest murder rates tend to be highly religious, such as Louisiana and Alabama, but the states with the lowest murder rates tend to be among the least religious in the country, such as Vermont and Oregon. Furthermore, although there are some notable exceptions, rates of most violent crimes tend to be lower in the less religious states and higher in the most religious states. Finally, of the top 50 safest cities in the world, nearly all are in relatively non-religious countries, and of the eight cities within the United States that make the safest-city list, nearly all are located in the least religious regions of the country.”⁷

Furthermore, “studies of heroic altruism during the Holocaust, found that the more secular people were, the more likely they were to rescue and help persecuted Jews.”⁸ In fact, when any given

⁴ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths*, 148 (July 2012), based on aggregated data from Pew Research Center for the People & the Press 2011 surveys. Available at <http://www.pewforum.org/Asian-Americans-A-Mosaic-of-Faiths-overview.aspx>.

⁵ “Nones on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” Pew Research Center, The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (October 9, 2012) available at <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>.

⁶ In a synthesis of the latest social scientific research concerning some of these issues see Zuckerman, Phil. 2009.

‘Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions.’ *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 3 Issue 6, 949-971.

⁷ Zuckerman at 955 (internal citations omitted).

⁸ *Id.*

factor of societal health or well-being is measured, invariably the *less* religious countries score better. The *least religious countries* of this world:

- Have the lowest rates of violent crime and homicide
- Are the best place to raise children
- Are the best place to be a mother
- Have the lowest rates of corruption
- Have the lowest levels of intolerance against racial and ethnic minorities
- Score highest when it comes to women's rights and gender equality
- Have the greatest protection and enjoyment of political and civil liberties
- Are better at educating their youth in reading, math, and science
- Are the most peaceful
- Are the most prosperous
- Have the highest quality of life.⁹

The pattern of lower religiosity to higher societal well-being is not limited to an international analysis. This trend also exists within United States. Those states that are the most religious also have a high occurrence of societal ills. States that tend to be among the *most religious* in the nation:

- Have the highest rates of poverty
- Have the highest rates of obesity
- Have the highest rates of infant mortality
- Have the highest rates of STDs
- Have the highest rates of teen pregnancy
- Have the lowest percentage of college-educated adults
- Have the highest rates of murder
- Have the highest rates of violent crime.¹⁰

Prayer is ineffectual. Public, government prayers not only conflict with the Constitution as pointed out above, but also with biblical teachings. Christians who know their bible are familiar with the injunction of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, condemning public prayer as hypocrisy. "Enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." (Matthew 6:5-13).

To avoid the constitutional concerns and the divisiveness these prayers cause within the community ***the solution is simple: discontinue using your government office to promote prayers.*** While religious leaders are free to hold prayer rallies, the CPD is not. Public officials should get off their knees and get to work. Do something practical to prevent other such crimes. Please inform us in writing of the actions that CPD is taking to remedy these constitutional violations. May we hear from you at your earliest convenience?

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Seidel
Staff Attorney

⁹ Zuckerman at 960-61 (internal citations omitted).

¹⁰ Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted).