

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

July 20, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL:

ric.metzgar@house.state.md.us

The Honorable Ric Metzgar
House Office Building, Room 413
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Promotion of religion on social media

Dear Delegate Metzgar:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to constitutional concerns regarding promotion of religion on your official Facebook page. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization with more than 32,000 members throughout the country, including over 500 in Maryland. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism.

A concerned Maryland resident contacted FFRF to report that on July 4, 2020, a post on your official government Facebook page quoted 1 Peter 2:16,¹ urging your constituents to begin "living as servants of God" and see the gift of Jesus' salvation.²

We write to request that you refrain from posting messages that proselytize or endorse religion on your official government social media accounts. When a government official uses his elected office to promote his personal religious beliefs, he violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The First Amendment prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages. The Supreme Court has long held that the Establishment Clause "mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). Your office violates this constitutional mandate when it proselytizes the Christian faith to all Americans, directing them to "liv[e] as servants of God."

As a delegate, you represent a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also minority religious and nonreligious citizens. Religious endorsements made in your official

¹ "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as living servants of God."

² See Enclosure.

capacity send a message that excludes the 35 percent of Americans who are not Christian, which includes the 26 percent who identify as nonreligious.³ These messages needlessly alienate the non-Christian and nonreligious citizens you represent, turning them into political outsiders in their own community.

It would be entirely possible, of course, for you to send uplifting and motivational messages to your constituents without ostracizing a significant portion of those you represent. By couching your sentiments in exclusively religious terms, and by quoting exclusively from one religion's holy book, you unnecessarily exclude a significant portion of the community. Regardless of your intent, this social media post sends the message to your minority religious and nonreligious constituents that their participation in the political process is less valued than that of their Christian counterparts.

The Supreme Court recently described the power of social media sites as “the principal sources for knowing current events, checking ads for employment, speaking and listening in the modern public square, and otherwise exploring the vast realms of human thought and knowledge.” *Packingham v. North Carolina*, 137 S. Ct. 1730, 1737 (2017) (internal quotations omitted). Government officials and entities must be particularly diligent not to entangle religious messages with official government pronouncements made in this important modern medium.

We request that you remove all religious posts from your official government Facebook page and avoid making similar posts in the future. Please inform us in writing of the steps you take to address this issue. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and I hope this letter finds you in good health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brendan Johnson, Esq.
Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosure

³ *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Oct. 17, 2019), available at <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.



Delegate Ric Metzgar

July 4 at 5:41 AM · 🌐

First Peter 2:16 "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."

The United States has had such great freedom, for well over 200 years, yet this freedom has become a license to sin. We use our freedom as a freedom to sin, and we don't even cover it up anymore. We don't blush at things that a hundred years ago would have been inconceivable to be seen in public. What used to be done in the dark is now done in broad daylight. I thank God for the freedom that we have, but it seems we've abused our freedom and are not "living as servants of God" anymore in this nation.

Let's change that today, make it not only a day to celebrate but a day to also unite together to find peace again. We can all live together and have different views and respect one another during our time here. Who will leave the 99, to find the 1 lost sheep? Thank you Jesus for your salvation, I pray for my brothers and sisters in America and around the world today, that they see this gift you freely give to us.

Have a safe 4th of July everyone! 🇺🇸



👍❤️ 31

5 Comments 5 Shares