

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 28, 2016

**SENT BY MAIL AND EMAIL to [BPTCTPD@bridgeportct.gov](mailto:BPTCTPD@bridgeportct.gov)**

Armando J. Perez  
Chief, Bridgeport Police Department  
300 Congress St.  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

Re: The link between religion and crime

Dear Chief Perez:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and local members who object to the Bridgeport Police Department promoting Christianity. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization that protects the constitutional separation between state and church. FFRF represents more than 23,000 members across the country

We understand that on Saturday, September 24, you addressed a crowd of about 50 people at a “police solidarity march.” According to media reports, you said, “We need God in our lives . . . The problems that we’re having is because people have abandoned church, people have abandoned God, and that cannot happen . . . Let’s bring God back in our lives, back in our church — bring our kids — in our city, in our schools — absolutely.” According to those some reports, in your remarks you “advocated a lot more praying.”<sup>1</sup>

## **1. You are misusing your government power**

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)).

It is unconstitutional for government officials to use their government office to advance, promote or endorse one religion over another, or religion over nonreligion. You must keep your religion to yourself when acting in your official capacity as police chief.

The Supreme Court has explained that “the prohibition against governmental endorsement of religion ‘preclude[s] government from conveying or attempting to convey a message that religion or a particular religious belief is favored or preferred.’” *Cnty. of Allegheny v. ACLU Greater Pittsburgh Chapter*, 492 U.S. 573, 593 (1989). The goal of this endorsement test is to ensure that the government does not “appear to take a position on questions of religious belief.” *Id.* at 594.

In 1993, FFRF also won an injunction against the mayor of Denver, Colorado, over his promotion, endorsement, and sponsorship of a “Day of Prayer.” *See FFRF, v. Denver*, No. 93 CV 6056 (District Court, City and County of Denver, Colorado 1993). In that case, Mayor Webb designated a “city wide day of prayer.” The court enjoined Mayor Webb and other City officials “**acting in an official capacity**, from promoting, endorsing, or supporting the Day of Prayer...” *Id.* at 5. It reasoned:

“[the event] would logically be interpreted by a reasonable person as an endorsement of religion. Because from all appearances Mayor Webb was acting in his official capacity in issuing the press release and conducting the press conference endorsing the Day of Prayer, the Court concludes that a reasonable person would interpret his conduct as governmental endorsement of religion. As such, it violates the Establishment Clause.” *Id.*

Government officials can worship, pray, and participate in religious events in their *personal* capacities. But they are not permitted to provide credibility or prestige to their religion by lending a government office and government title to religious events. Their office and title belong to “We the people,” not the office’s temporary occupant.

## **2. Prayers and converting people to Christianity will not lower crime**

Apparently, you believe that prayer will lower crime. But this is simply not true. First, prayer has been shown to be entirely ineffectual. Prayer cannot stop violence.

Second, scientific studies<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup>

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.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, when any given 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 and 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 and the most prosperous
- Have the highest quality of life.<sup>5</sup>

The pattern of lower religiosity to higher societal well being 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 violent crime and murder.<sup>6</sup>

These studies do not prove that religion causes all of society's ills, but it seems that your suggestions may actually be counterproductive. This makes a certain amount of logical sense too. As Thomas Paine said, **"Accustom a people to believe that priests or any other class of men can forgive sins, and you will have sins in abundance."**<sup>7</sup>

To avoid the constitutional concerns and the divisiveness this program will cause within the community ***the solution is simple: discontinue using your official office to promote your personal religion.*** Do something practical to prevent crime. Please inform us in writing that you have decided to uphold your oath to protect the Constitution, not trample it underfoot. May we hear from you at your earliest convenience?

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Seidel  
Staff Attorney

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<sup>1</sup> Cedar Attanasio, "Police chief explains Bridgeport's problems: 'people have abandoned God,'" CT Post, Sept. 25, 2016, at <http://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Police-chief-explains-Bridgeport-s-problems-9283077.php#>.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Zuckerman at 955 (internal citations omitted).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Zuckerman at 960-61 (internal citations omitted).

<sup>6</sup> Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Paine, A Letter to Camille Jordan (1797), in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, (GP Putnam's Sons, 1896) IV:252. Available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=srpGH65Zl9kC&pg=PA252>