

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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March 7, 2014

**SENT BY U.S MAIL & EMAIL TO: [cglancy@casselberry.org](mailto:cglancy@casselberry.org)**

The Honorable Charlene Glancy  
Mayor of Casselberry  
95 Triplet Lake Drive  
Casselberry, FL 32707

Re: Endorsement of The Venue Church

Dear Mayor Glancy:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to your promotion of a church in your official capacity as mayor. We were contacted by a concerned local citizen. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization which works to protect the constitutional principle of separation of state and church. FFRF represents more than 20,000 members across the country, including nearly 1,000 in Florida.

We understand that you participated in a promotional video for The Venue Church, where you were identified as the Mayor of Casselberry, and made the following statement:

As a leader of Casselberry, I believe that this community is on to something really great. Let's start with the name Venue. I mean Venue, for a Christian, is anywhere and everywhere, because when you believe in the gospel, you wanna talk about it all the time, walk the walk, and be out there all the time in your community with that. And, what I'm very excited about is that Venue is located in the heart and soul of the Casselberry community, at our middle school. I believe that this is gonna be an opportunity to bless people, to help the hurting, but also for people to grow, and to see this community flourish as a result of all the great things that could happen in this church called The Venue. This is a groundbreaking opportunity for you to take part and for you to decide to invest in your local community and make a difference in the newest, most profound way yet. I'm surprised that nobody thought of this sooner, but I'm ever so grateful that this is coming to us here in the Casselberry community.<sup>1</sup>

As mayor you represent a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also nonbelievers and adherents of other faiths. Your active promotion of The Venue Church in your official capacity unabashedly promotes a particular church and its world view, sending an official message of endorsement of religion over non-religion and of exclusion to many of your constituents.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Venue Church - We're Coming to Casselberry!" available at <http://youtu.be/J7EZg2IcjeY>.

You of course may, as a private citizen, attend the church of your choice. But the federal and state Constitutions — and good etiquette — dictate that you as mayor should not directly summon your constituents to “take part” and “invest in your local community and make a difference in the newest, most profound way yet” by attending a specific church, or allow your title as mayor to be used to promote a church. It is an inappropriate usurpation of the Mayor’s Office for your title to be used in such a way. As the Supreme Court has explained, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.” *W. Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943). Instead of “be[ing] out there all the time in your community with [the gospel],” you should recognize that you represent a diverse constituency, and respect that diversity instead of bidding citizens to convert to your particular brand of religion.

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. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985)). It can promote neither one religion over another, nor religion over nonreligion. Religious endorsements such as yours of The Venue Church “send a 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 of the political community.” *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring). The Mayor’s Office should take care to be above the fray of religious discord, and should not appear to be favoring one religious position over others.

Moreover, as mayor, you should be wary of associating with this particular church. Far from being “an investment in the local community,” The Venue Church is intent on bringing a multitude of Establishment Clause violations to Seminole County Public Schools and Orange County Public Schools. FFRF is also sending letters to those school districts, both of which detail, over five pages, the myriad violations that have come from the districts’ close relationship with The Venue Church. As an elected official, you should condemn an organization that perpetuates constitutional violations, not publicly invite your citizens to join it.

We request assurances that in the future, you will not use your public office to promote Christianity so as to respect the rights of conscience of your constituents.

Sincerely,



Andrew Seidel  
Staff Attorney

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