

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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November 22, 2017

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL**

**fsenn@cityofnewberry.com**

Mayor Foster Senn  
City of Newberry  
P.O. Box 538  
Newberry, SC 29108

Re: Unconstitutional endorsement of religion

Dear Mayor Senn:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to a constitutional concern regarding the City of Newberry's promotion and involvement in a religious activity. We were contacted by a concerned area resident. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with about 30,000 members across the country, including nearly 200 members in South Carolina. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that the City of Newberry regularly sponsors a Christian "Bibles and Badges" bible study. We understand that the bible studies are held in City facilities and the City is listed on Facebook as the meeting host. The City's official Facebook page promotes these bible studies, which involve the public and City police officers who are in uniform. The City describes the event as providing "not only a chance to interact and learn about the bible with other officers, but to build stronger connections within the community and interact with local religious leaders." The City's promotion of the bible studies has repeatedly included calls for members of the public to attend. Please see the enclosed images detailing this violation.

The Supreme Court has long recognized 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); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947). Hosting and promoting a Christian bible study fails to respect either constitutional mandate of neutrality. It endorses religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths.

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 Ch.*, 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. With respect to law enforcement in particular, federal courts have specifically prohibited law enforcement agencies from proselytizing or promoting religion. *See Milwaukee*

*Deputy Sheriff's Ass'n v. Clarke, 588 F.3d 523 (7th Cir. 2009) (ruling sheriff meetings with presentations by religious group unconstitutional).*

The City's hosting and recruiting for a bible study amount to an unconstitutional advancement and endorsement of religion. A municipal government cannot legally hold a bible study in government offices, promote it via official communication channels, and involve its officials and employees in the event itself.

The police department serves not only Christians, but also atheists, agnostics, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus among others. Encouraging citizens to participate in a bible study 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 excluded or like political outsiders because the city's police department they support with their taxes promotes devotional bible studies. In addition, law enforcement officers who are not Christian should not be marginalized by the city government that they serve.

The City must cease hosting and promoting Bibles and Badges. Certainly, churches and other private groups may organize bible studies on their own. However, the City cannot promote bible studies via Facebook, utilize City resources to organize such an event, or otherwise endorse bible studies. Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to remedy this constitutional violation. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Patrick Elliott  
Senior Counsel

Events

Calendar

Birthdays

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Bibles and Badges

Past

+ Create Event



# Bibles and Badges

Public · Hosted by City of Newberry, SC Government

★ Interested

➔ Share

🕒 Dec 7 at 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM · EDT

**DEC**  
7 Thu 6:00 PM

📍 City of Newberry, SC Government  
1330 College St, Newberry, South Carolina 29108

Show Map


About

Discussion

✍ Write Post   📷 Add Photo/Video   🗳 Create Poll

 Write something...

### RECENT ACTIVITY

 **City of Newberry, SC Government**  
November 2 at 8:07am · 🌐

Tonight's the night for another Bibles and Badges bible study! We hope to see you there! Josh Parson from Ascension Ministries will be leading tonight's study.

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➔ Share



## City of Newberry, SC Government



October 6 · 🌐

Good crowd for last night's Bibles and Badges bible study! We hope you'll come back to join us next month, November 2! Invite your friends to join us as well!



👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share



**City of Newberry, SC Government**



October 4 · 🌐

This picture reminds us of our Bibles and Badges bible study. Don't forget, it will be tomorrow night at 6 pm!



Like



Comment



Share



**City of Newberry, SC Government**



September 28 · 🌐

We hope to see everyone NEXT Thursday, October 5 at 6 p.m. James Henricks, Pastor of Summer Memorial Lutheran Church will lead the bible study.



Like



Comment



Share