

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

September 8, 2015

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL
bdeblasio@cityhall.nyc.gov

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Office of the Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: New York City Ticket Giveaway Contest for Pope Francis Central Park
Procession

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to New York City's Ticket Giveaway Contest for Pope Francis Central Park Procession. As you know, FFRF is a national nonprofit organization representing over 23,000 members across the country, including over 1,200 in New York. FFRF's purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to represent the rights and views of nonbelievers.

It is our understanding that New York City is holding a ticket giveaway contest for Pope Francis' visit to Central Park on Friday, September 25th. According to the NYC website two tickets will be drawn on September 10th for this event.¹

It is well settled that the First Amendment "mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary Cnty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 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)). In this case, the City of New York is showing favoritism to one religion, Catholicism, over all minority religions and nonreligion by giving away free tickets to see a religious dignitary. This practice violates the well-established constitutional principle that the government must remain neutral toward religion.


By singling out this event for a ticket giveaway, NYC appears to be endorsing Pope Francis' sectarian religious message. The sponsorship of a religious message is

¹ <http://www1.nyc.gov/nyc-resources/papal-visit.page>

impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to inmates who are nonadherents “that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community and accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.” *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1985) (O’Connor, J., concurring).

The City of New York must stop this ticket giveaway immediately. May we hear from you at your earliest convenience?

Very truly,


Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-President