

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

June 26, 2018

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: beth.spiegel@citynmb.com

The Honorable Beth E. Spiegel
Mayor
City of North Miami Beach
17011 NE 19 Avenue
North Miami Beach, FL 33162

Re: Sponsorship of National Day of Prayer Events

Dear Mayor Spiegel:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge North Miami Beach to cease using City resources to organize and promote National Day of Prayer events. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 33,000 members across the country, including more than 1,500 members and a chapter in Florida. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned citizen has reported that each year the City of North Miami Beach sponsors and promotes a National Day of Prayer event. It is our understanding that the 2013 event was held at City Hall, and that the City subsidized the event, which one councilmember estimated cost taxpayers \$5,000.¹ We understand that this year's event took place on May 3 and was promoted on the City's official Facebook page, Twitter page, and website. Please see the enclosed screenshots. We also understand that citizens were directed to R.S.V.P. for the event through the City's Division of Public Affairs.

As you may be aware, the National Day of Prayer is a sectarian event. It originated with the Reverend Billy Graham during his evangelical crusade in Washington, D.C. in 1952. He expressed an openly Christian purpose, seeking an annual prayer proclamation by the President because he wanted "the Lord Jesus Christ" to be recognized across the land. Subsequently, the National Day of Prayer Task Force was created to "communicate with every individual the need for personal repentance and prayer, mobilizing the Christian community to intercede for America and its leadership." The task force issues annual National Day of Prayer proclamations and submits them to the President, choosing a theme with supporting scripture from the bible. This year's theme is "Pray for America – UNITY" based upon the New Testament verse Ephesians 4:3.

In its announcement of the theme for 2018, the task force reveals that its idea of "unity" amounts to religious assimilation through proselytization. It writes that "our greatest need" is "the next great move of God in America," which it hopes "will catapult the message of the gospel nationally and internationally."² The task force has a Statement of Faith that is exclusive to Christians, including that "The Holy Bible is

¹ Claudia DoCampo, *Pastors Speak Out About Holding Controversial National Prayer Day Event at North Miami City Hall*, NBC MIAMI (Last visited June 25, 2018), <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/Pastors-Speak-Out-About-Holding-National-Prayer-Day-Event-at-North-Miami-City-Hall-203686681.html>.

² *Theme and Verse – National Day of Prayer Theme for 2018*, NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER TASK FORCE (last visited Apr. 24, 2018), http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/theme_and_verse.

the inspired, only, infallible, authoritative Word of The Living God” and a belief in “the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.”³

We ask that North Miami Beach drop its support for this divisive, evangelistic vision for America and cease holding National Day of Prayer events.

The City’s organization and endorsement of National Day of Prayer events poses constitutional concerns. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from organizing or endorsing a religious event. As the Supreme Court has put it, the Establishment Clause “mandates government 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); *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). These National Day of Prayer events, which are organized and promoted by the City, create the appearance of favoritism toward Christians.

In 2002, a federal court enjoined a city and mayor from organizing, advertising, promoting or endorsing a prayer breakfast. *Newman v. City of East Point*, 181 F. Supp. 2d 1374 (N.D. Ga. 2002). In that case, the court restricted the use of city funds, employees, resources and supplies in facilitating the Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast. *See id.* As a result of the city’s activities (making and sending invitations, issuing press releases, advertising the event, etc.), the court stated, “an objective observer would most certainly conclude that the City of East Point has endorsed religion, specifically Christianity, by its actions.” *Id.* at 1381.

Legal arguments aside, these events are unnecessarily divisive. The events send the message that the City not only prefers religion over non-religion, but also Christianity over all other faiths. They alienate non-Christians in North Miami Beach by turning them into political outsiders in their own community. The National Day of Prayer is explicitly designed to exclude the 24% of Americans who are nonreligious and, more broadly, the 30% of Americans who are non-Christian.⁴

We hope you’ll agree that North Miami Beach should strive to appear equally welcoming of all residents, regardless of whether they are Christian, practice a minority religion, or are nonreligious. The City must refrain from further organization and promotion of religious events. Please inform us in writing of the steps taken to respect the right of conscience of all North Miami Beach residents and to send a message that is inclusive of the minority religious and nonreligious among you.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line
Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation

CAL:lbc

³ *Statement of Faith*, NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER TASK FORCE (last visited Apr. 24, 2018), www.nationaldayofprayer.org/statement_of_faith.

⁴ Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity*, PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Sept. 6, 2017), available at www.prii.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf.

The City of North Miami Beach invites you to participate in the

National DAY OF PRAYER



Thursday, May 3, 2018 at Noon

Ronald A. Silver "Y.E.S." Center

📍 17051 NE 19th Avenue

National Day of Prayer is an annual observance held on the first Thursday of May, inviting people of all faiths to pray for the nation. It is a day that transcends differences, bringing together citizens from all backgrounds to pray for our nation's leadership in the seven centers of power: Government, Military, Media, Business, Education, Church and Family.



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To R.S.V.P. please call the
Division of Public Affairs at (305) 787-6028



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Follow

You're invited to the City's National Day of Prayer service at 12 noon today at the Y.E.S. Center in [#NorthMiamiBeach](#). Food and refreshments will be available immediately following the service. [#NationalDayOfPrayer](#) [#IamNMB](#)

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8:23 AM - 3 May 2018

National Day of Prayer



Thursday, May 3, 2018

We invite you to participate in the City's National Day of Prayer service from Noon - 1 p.m. on Thursday, May 3, 2018 in the Ronald A. Silver Y.E.S. Center Auditorium (17051 NE 19th Avenue). Food and refreshments will be available immediately following the service.




City of North Miami Beach, Florida shared an event.



May 3 · 🌐

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THU, MAY 3

National Day of Prayer

City of North Miami Beach, Florida · North Miami...

31 people interested

★ Interested



City of North Miami Beach, Florida

May 5 · 🌐



#ICYMI: On May 3, 2018 the City of North Miami Beach hosted it's annual #NationalDayofPrayer 🙏. The National Day of Prayer is an annual day of observance held on the first Thursday of May, designated by the United States Congress, where people are asked "to turn to God in prayer and meditation". Each year since its inception, the president has signed a proclamation, encouraging all Americans to pray on this day. #IamNMB



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