

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

June 20, 2017

**SENT VIA EMAIL ONLY**

taxpc@co.orange.tx.us

Karen Fisher  
Tax Assessor-Collector  
Orange County Tax Office  
P. O. Box 1568  
Orange, TX 77631-1568

Re: Religious Displays in the Courthouse Administrative Building

Dear Ms. Fisher:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring in the Orange County Courthouse Administrative Building. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 29,000 members across the country, including more than 1,200 members in Texas. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

A concerned Orange County citizen recently contacted FFRF to report that prominently displayed in the building is a religious sign stating "Trust In The Lord." To remove any possible ambiguity in the message, there is a cross in the middle of the sign. This religious message is placed next to another sign, which reads: "WAIT HERE." There is no doubt that this sign as well as the religious sign are meant to get the attention of the general public. Furthermore, the concerned citizen also noticed multiple crosses on display at the workspace of the administrator whom assisted them. The complainant has provided photographs of the displays. We hope that we can resolve this issue with you.

The Supreme Court has long recognized that the First Amendment "mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary Cnty. 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). Displaying signs that promote Christianity, along with Latin crosses, fails to respect either constitutional mandate of neutrality. It endorses religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths.

The religious significance of the Latin cross is unambiguous and indisputable. "The Latin cross . . . is the principal symbol of Christianity around the world, and display of the cross alone could not reasonably be taken to have any secular point." *Capitol Square Review and Advisory Bd. v. Pinette*, 515 U.S. 753, 792 (1995) (Souter, J., concurring). An overwhelming majority of federal courts agree that the Latin cross universally represents the Christian religion, and only the

Christian religion. See, e.g., *Harris v. City of Zion*, 927 F.2d 1401, 1412 (7th Cir. 1991) (“a Latin cross . . . endorses or promotes a particular religious faith. It expresses an unambiguous choice in favor of Christianity.”), *cert. denied*, 505 U.S. 1218 (1992); *ACLU of Ill. v. City of St. Charles*, 794 F.2d 265, 271 (7th Cir. 1986) (“When prominently displayed . . . the cross dramatically conveys a message of governmental support for Christianity, whatever the intentions of those responsible for the display may be. Such a display is not only religious but sectarian.”), *cert. denied*, 479 U.S. 961 (1986).

These signs convey a message to non-Christians in Orange County that they are not “favored members of the political community.” *Cnty. of Allegheny v. Am. Civil Liberties Union Greater Pittsburgh Ch.*, 492 U.S. 573, 595 (1989). These citizens should not be made to feel excluded, like outsiders in their own community, because their county prominently places Christian symbols and promotes Christianity on county property. While many Orange County citizens may support these religious sentiments, a significant proportion will feel alienated. Overall, nearly 30% Americans are non-Christians, either practicing a minority religion or no religion at all, including about 44% of millennials.<sup>1</sup>

We ask that you please remove the unconstitutional religious displays immediately. Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to respect the right of conscience of Orange County citizens. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Sam Grover  
Staff Attorney

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Enclosure

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<sup>1</sup> *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 12, 2015), available at [www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/).



