

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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June 15, 2015

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL TO: gjudd@polksheriff.org

Sheriff Grady Judd
Polk County Sheriff's Office
1891 Jim Keene Blvd
Winter Haven, FL 33880

Dear Sheriff Judd:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to urge you to cease using your position as sheriff and the trappings of the sheriff's office to promote your own personal religion. Concerned local residents contacted us. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 22,500 members across the country, including 1,100 members in Florida and a local chapter, Central Florida Freethought Community. We protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our understanding that you regularly give sermons at the First Baptist Church at the Mall in Lakeland using a Polk County government office, uniform, and title. For instance, on April 19, 2015 you gave a sermon at entitled "Wouldn't The World Be Better If Everyone Behaved Like A Christian." You gave the sermon dressed in your Polk County Sheriff's Office Class "A" uniform, proclaimed your support for faith-based jailing, and claimed that the best way to reform individuals who have broken the law is through Jesus. You are also listed as "Sheriff Grady Judd" repeatedly on the church website, including as a preacher.

Abuse of a public office for personal religious gain

The Supreme Court has said time and again that the First Amendment "mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary County, 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. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947). The government must remain neutral toward religion because "the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere." *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2000).

Promoting your personal religion using a Polk County government title and uniform gives the unfortunate impression that the county supports and endorses the First Baptist Church on the Mall and its religious teachings. The government is sending the 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..." *Jaffree at 53*. (citations omitted). "This presents a problem for the Sheriff because the Establishment Clause prohibits the government from 'promot[ing] or affiliat[ing] itself with any religious doctrine or organization.'" *Milwaukee Deputy Sheriffs' Ass'n v. Clarke*, 588 F.3d 523, 528 (7th Cir. 2009), (Sup. Ct. cite omitted). A message reinforced by the content of your sermons.

In that sermon you also told the Christian audience, “Ladies and gentlemen, you are the majority.” As sheriff, you represent a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also atheists, agnostics, Jews, Muslims, and Hindus. Giving this sermon in your official capacity, wearing your official uniform, unabashedly promotes this church and its religious views. You are excluding the nearly 30% of U.S. adults and the 30% of Florida adults who are non-Christian.¹ This message alienates both non-Christians and nonbelievers in Polk County by turning them into political outsiders in their own community.

Of course you are free to attend church, preach at your church, and even teach Sunday school. But you cannot preach in church as Sheriff Judd, you must do so as Mr. Judd, private citizen. In your personal capacity you can freely exercise your religion as you see fit. In your official capacity as an officer of the government, you are bound by the Establishment Clause and cannot abuse that office to promote your personal religious choices.

Incorrect factual assertions in your metaphysical preaching

In the “Wouldn’t The World Be Better If Everyone Behaved Like A Christian” sermon, you seem to think that Christianity has a moral superiority that even has the ability to stop crime—hence, your support of faith-based jails.

Hundreds of scientific studies prove you wrong.² Morality does not require religion. Dr. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, a PhD in clinical psychology, wrote, “The claim that atheists are somehow more likely to be immoral has long been disproven by systematic studies.”³

A variation of your assertion has actually been scientifically tested. “If religion, prayer, or God-belief hindered criminal behavior, and secularity or atheism fostered lawlessness, we would expect to find the most religious nations having the lowest murder rates and the least religious nations having the highest.”⁴ But “[w]e find just the opposite. Murder rates are actually lower in more secular nations and higher in more religious nations where belief in God is deep and widespread. And within America, the states with the highest murder rates tend to be highly religious, such as Louisiana and Alabama, but the states with the lowest murder rates tend to be among the least religious in the country, such as Vermont and Oregon.”⁵

In fact, when any given factor of societal health or well-being is measured it is invariably the *less* religious countries that score better. The *least religious countries* of this world:

- Have the lowest rates of violent crime, homicide, and corruption
- Are the best place to raise children and be a mother
- Have the lowest levels of intolerance against racial and ethnic minorities
- Score highest when it comes to women’s rights and gender equality
- Have the greatest protection and enjoyment of political and civil liberties
- Are better at educating their youth in reading, math, and science
- Are the most peaceful, the most prosperous, and have the highest quality of life.⁶

The pattern of lower religiosity to higher societal well-being is not limited to an international analysis. This trend also exists within United States. Those states that are the most religious also have a high occurrence of societal ills. **The *most religious states in the nation* tend to have the highest rates of: poverty, obesity, infant mortality, sexually transmitted diseases, teen**

pregnancy, murder, and violent crime.⁷ Your claim that increased religiosity lowers crime is simply nonsense.

To avoid these constitutional concerns we simply ask you to refrain from using the Polk County Sheriff's office, title, and uniform while giving sermons. Please inform us in writing of the actions you will take to remedy these concerns.

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Seidel
Staff Attorney

ALS:njf

¹ *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, Pew Research Center (May 12, 2015) available at www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

² See Zuckerman, Phil. 2009. 'Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions.' *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 3 Issue 6, 949-971.

³ Beit-Hallahmi, Benjamin. 2007. 'Atheists: A Psychological Profile.' Pp 300-317 in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, edited by Michael Martin. New York, NY.: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Zuckerman at 955 (internal citations omitted).

⁵ Zuckerman at 955 (internal citations omitted).

⁶ Zuckerman at 960-61 (internal citations omitted).

⁷ Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted).

Wouldn't the World be Better if Everyone Behaved Like a Christian

Apr 19, 2015



SHARE     

I want to know more about...*

☐ Being baptized

☐ Joining First Baptist Church at the Mall

PREACHER: Sheriff Grady Judd