

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

July 28, 2016

**SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:**  
**gthom@ptc-law.com**

Gary W. Thomas, Esq.  
Troutman Town Attorney  
Pressly Thomas & Conley  
224 Harrill Street  
Statesville, NC 28677-5347

Re: Government funding of churches

Dear Mr. Thomas:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to object to the Town of Troutman's plan to disburse town-owned liquor store profits to churches. We were contacted by a concerned local taxpayer. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization that works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church. We represent nearly 24,000 members across the country, including more than 500 members in North Carolina.

It is our understanding that the Town of Troutman voted in 2013 to allow a Town-owned liquor store, ABC Liquor, within Town boundaries. FFRF submitted an Open Records Request on May 19, 2015 and received a document detailing multiple options for the liquor store, one of which was to form a Troutman ABC Board and distribute a portion of the store's profits to Help Ministries. Because the Town Council established an ABC Board in December 2015, and has maintained appointments to it, we assume this option was selected and the project is moving ahead as planned.

Help Ministries is a conglomeration of Baptist Churches that is plainly committed to religious evangelism. The organization's name is an acronym for "Help Evangelize Lost People," and its website states that the ministry's "ultimate goal is to carry out the scriptural teaching of the Great Commission in preaching the gospel to every creature."<sup>1</sup> Regardless of any social services Help Ministries may provide, their goal is undeniably to win converts to the Baptist version of Christianity.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.helpmin.us/> (in the box of rotating text, under the heading "A Sound Plan...").

The Town of Troutman cannot constitutionally support this sectarian religious mission with ABC Liquor profits. We write to request assurances that the Town's profit distribution plan will be changed so that the Town does not finance religious evangelism.

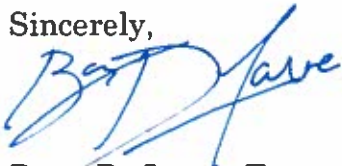
The Establishment Clause strictly prohibits the government from advancing religion. This means that the government may not "aid any or all religious faiths or sects in the dissemination of their doctrines." *McCullum v. Bd. of Educ.*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948). Aiding a religious sect in the dissemination of their doctrines is exactly what the Town of Troutman would do by giving public funds to an evangelical Baptist ministry.

The Supreme Court has struck down grants to religious institutions when there is a possibility that the funds will be used to advance religion. *See Comm. for Pub. Educ. v. Nyquist*, 413 U.S. 756, 777 (1973) (striking down repair grants meant to renovate parochial schools because the buildings were used for sectarian purposes); *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602, 625 (1971) (holding that government aid to nonpublic education impermissibly entangled the government with religion, even when limited to secular subjects). With an "ultimate goal" to "preach the gospel to every creature," Help Ministries is very likely to promote religion in the course of all its public activities. As such, these activities may not be subsidized with taxpayer funds.

Nor can the government promote one religion over another, or religion over nonreligion. The First Amendment "requires the state to be neutral in its relations with groups of religious believers and non-believers." *Everson v. Bd. of Educ.*, 303 U.S. 1, 18 (1947); *see also Tex. Monthly, Inc. v. Bullock*, 489 U.S. 1, 27-28 (1997) (separate opinion concurring in judgment) (the "government may not favor religious belief over disbelief"). Funding Help Ministries promotes not only religion over nonreligion, but Baptist Christianity in particular.

The Select Board must not grant taxpayer money to Help Ministries, or to any other evangelical religious institution. Please respond in writing with assurances that the Town's profit distribution plan for ABC Liquor will be amended so that we may notify our complainant that this matter has been resolved.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ryan D. Jayne".

Ryan D. Jayne, Esq.  
Diane Uhl Legal Fellow  
Freedom From Religion Foundation