

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 22, 2014

**SENT via U.S. Mail and Email:** [mayorboles@comcast.net](mailto:mayorboles@comcast.net)

The Honorable Joseph Boles  
Mayor, St. Augustine  
19 Riberia St.  
St. Augustine, FL 32084

Re: Inappropriate invitation to pope in your mayoral capacity

Dear Mayor Boles:

On behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and our 21,000 members nationwide, including more than 1,000 Florida members and our Florida Chapter, the Central Florida Freethought Community, we write to express our dismay over your inappropriate invitation on behalf of all St. Augustine citizens to the head of one religious denomination to visit St. Augustine.

You've explained that "St. Augustine would be a natural pick for the Pope [because] it's the birthplace of Christianity in the new world, specifically Catholicism." According to reports, you are "working with the Catholic Church" to bring the pope here.<sup>1</sup> We understand you have written a letter to Carlo Vigano, Apostolic Nunciature United States of America, which officially extends the invitation to Pope Francis. We also understand that Vigano visited the local parish on September 16, 2014 as a papal representative.

Your invitation to the pope was written on mayoral letterhead in your official capacity as mayor of St. Augustine. As such it is a shocking breach of your civil and secular duties as mayor and to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which you took an oath to uphold. The United States, the individual states and municipalities are barred from having or establishing a state religion, or favoring one religion over another or religion over non-religion. The Supreme Court has clearly explained the limits of government when it comes to promotion of religion:

The "establishment of religion" clause of the First Amendment means at least this: neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. **Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups, and**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.firstcoastnews.com/story/news/local/2014/03/05/pope-to-visit/6094635/>

**vice versa.** In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect “a wall of separation between church and State.” *Everson v. Bd. of Education*, 330 U.S. 1, 16 (1947) (emphasis added).

You were not elected bishop of St. Augustine. As mayor you serve all St. Augustine citizens — of any or of no denominations, including Jews, Wiccans, Hindus, Muslims and Protestants — and those who protest against all religions. The nonreligious now comprise up to a fifth of the U.S. population. A majority of your citizens do not consider the pope their Holy Father. Nor do they consider it the business of the mayor to celebrate “the birthplace of Christianity in the new world, specifically Catholicism.”

Celebrating the zealous missionaries, who forcibly converted or killed Native Americans, for establishing a beachhead that caused untold misery to thousands of indigenous people, is hardly appropriate. Nor is celebrating the brutal Catholic slaughter of 111 French Huguenots committed by St. Augustine founder Pedro Menendez de Aviles when the shipwrecked French soldiers refused to convert to Catholicism. Or perhaps you wish the pope to celebrate the slaughter of 134 Frenchmen two weeks later, again for refusing to convert to Catholicism?<sup>2</sup> After all, when Menendez hung the bodies from the trees, the accompanying sign noted that they were killed and displayed “not as Frenchmen, but as heretics.”<sup>3</sup> These are the incidents that solidified the Catholic control of Florida you seem to think worth celebrating.

Religion divides us. The framers knew this and that is precisely why they chose to erect a wall of separation between state and church. The Supreme Court has also recognized the divisiveness of religion. In *McCreary County*, the Supreme Court wrote, “...the divisiveness of religion in current public life is inescapable.” 545 U.S. 844, 881 (2005). In *Van Orden v. Perry*, Justice Breyer wrote in his controlling opinion that the purpose of the First Amendment is to “avoid that divisiveness based upon religion that promotes social conflict, sapping the strength of government and religion alike.” 545 U.S. 677, 698 (2005). An early Wisconsin Supreme Court justice put it most eloquently:

“There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed.” *Weiss v. District Board*, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890)(Orton, J. concurring).

If the historic religious slaughter of Protestants by Catholics as an example of the divisiveness of religion and the words of these courts do not persuade, perhaps a reminder of the other costs will.

The invitation is fiscally reckless, given the exorbitant costs of hosting a pope, costs which invariably end up being borne by taxpayers for crowd control, police protection, etc. The UK

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<sup>2</sup> See National Park Service Fort Matanzas website article, “The Massacre of the French,” at [http://www.nps.gov/foma/historyculture/the\\_massacre.htm](http://www.nps.gov/foma/historyculture/the_massacre.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Pedro Menendez de Aviles. (2014). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/374916/Pedro-Menendez-de-Aviles>

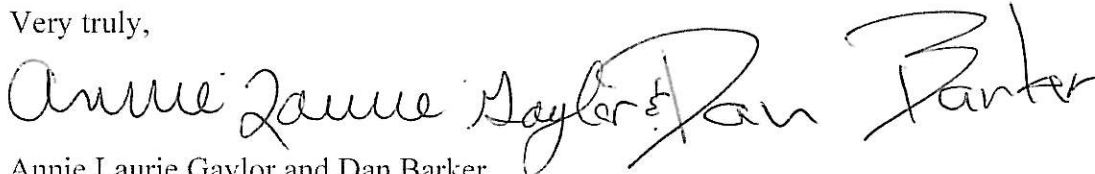
was forced to mount a huge security operation for Benedict's September 2010 visit. Taxpayers covered half of the \$31 million security costs alone. Spaniards marched in the streets of Madrid in August 2011 to protest the excessive costs (at least \$144 million) to taxpayers in Spain of the pope's visit that month. One woman carried a placard saying, "Religion is the opium of the people, don't drug yourself with our taxes." Riots erupted in Brazil over the public cost of Benedict's visit a year ago (at least \$50 million). U.S. taxpayers subsidized Pope John Paul's several visits to the United States to the tune of millions and millions.

Citizens should not have to subsidize the very wealthy and tax-exempt Roman Catholic Church. It's bad enough to put up with the Catholic Church's harmful and antediluvian doctrines — against safe and legal abortion, contraception, gay rights, same sex marriage, the equal rights and ordination of women as priests — without citizens having to literally pay to put up the pope.

The shameful and unrelenting scandal of sexual abuse of minors within the ranks of the Catholic clergy and even more scandalous cover-ups by its highest ranking officials have tarnished dioceses through the country, and left a devastated trail of victims and their families. Nearly 100 priests have been sued or accused of such abuse in Florida, including St. Augustine. You are inviting the head of the body that not only failed to protect the children, but was complicit in their sexual and mental abuse.<sup>4</sup>

Please rescind your invitation — made in your official capacity as the secular mayor of St. Augustine — to the pope to visit St. Augustine.

Very truly,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is "Annie Laurie Gaylor" and the second is "Dan Barker". They are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker  
Co-Presidents  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

ALG/DB:als

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<sup>4</sup> Bishop Accountability.org database of publicly accused US priests at <http://www.bishop-accountability.org/member/psearch.jsp> as of September 19, 2014.