



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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SENT VIA U.S. MAIL & FAX
(630) 530-3014

January 29, 2010

The Honorable Peter P. DiCianni and Members of the Council
The City of Elmhurst
209 N. York Street
Elmhurst IL 60126

Re: City Council Invocations

Dear Mayor DiCianni and the Members of the City Council:

Our national organization, which works to keep state and church separate, is writing on behalf of our Elmhurst members, who strenuously oppose the practice of commencing prayers at City Council meetings.

It is our information and understanding that the Elmhurst City Council ("Council") is scheduled to review a proposal by Mayor DiCianni to open Council meetings with prayers. Mayor DiCianni was quoted in the Elmhurst Press saying, "We're doing God's work up here, and we may need (prayer)."

Government prayer is unnecessary, inappropriate, and divisive. Calling upon Council members and citizens to rise and prayer (even silently) is coercive, embarrassing and beyond the scope of secular city government. Council members are free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way. They should not worship on taxpayers' time. As First Ward Alderman Diane Gutenkauf noted in her objection to the proposal: "We have been elected to do city business and opening our meetings with prayer and discussing the possibility of opening our meetings with prayer has the potential to bog us down in the discussion of whether this is appropriate. . . . I would prefer to keep church and religious issues separate from governmental issues."

The city, under the secular requirements of Art. 1, Sect. 3 of the Illinois Constitution, should not lend its power and prestige to religion, amounting to a governmental endorsement that excludes the 15% of your population that is nonreligious (American Religious Identification Survey, 2008). The violation is inevitably compounded when a majority of prayers are to Jesus or a majority of the officiants are Christian or Christian clergy. Such prayer creates acrimony, makes minorities feel like political outsiders in their own community, and shows unconstitutional governmental preference not just for religion over nonreligion, but Christianity over other faiths.

Citizens of all religions or no religion are compelled to come before you on civic, secular matters: variances, sewers, building permits, restaurant licenses, sidewalk repair, etc. They should not be subjected to a religious show or test, or be expected to demonstrate religious

obeisance at a city function. We fail to see why divine guidance is needed over such earthly matters anyway.

Christians who know their bible are familiar with the biblical injunction of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, condemning as hypocrisy public prayer. "Enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret." (Matthew 6:5-13). Observing a strict separation of church and state offends nobody, and honors not only the First Amendment, but also the very tenets being professed during city prayers.

On behalf of our Elmhurst membership and our secular Constitution, we urge the City Council to concentrate on city matters.

Sincerely,



Annie Laurie Gaylor
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