

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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March 10, 2014

Mailed and faxed 920/448-3081

Jim Schmitt
Mayor, City of Green Bay
100 North Jefferson Street
Room 200
Green Bay WI 54301-5026

Re: Utterly inappropriate invitation to pope in your mayoral capacity

Dear Mayor Schmitt:

On behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and our 20,000 members nationwide, including more than 1,300 Wisconsin members, many of whom are taxpayers in the City of Green Bay, we're writing to express our shock and dismay over your grossly inappropriate invitation on behalf of Green Bay citizens to the spiritual head of one denomination, to visit Green Bay to "make pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help."

Your letter to the pope was written on mayoral letterhead in your official capacity as mayor of Green Bay. 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 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 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). [Boldface emphasis added]

You were not elected bishop of Green Bay. As mayor you serve all Green Bay citizens – of any or of no denominations, including Jews, Wiccans, Hindus, Muslims and Protestants — and those who protest against all religions. You even signed your mayoral letter, "Your servant in Christ." The nonreligious now comprise up to a third of the U.S. population. A majority of Green Bay citizens do not consider the pope their "Holy Father." Nor do they consider it the business of the mayor to promote a "pilgrimage" to a Catholic shrine. Nor do they believe there was a "Blessed Virgin Mary apparition," even if it was "approved by the Catholic Church in the United States."

They do not believe that Mary, ablaze in light and clothed in dazzling white, appeared to a young Belgian woman in 1859 and told her to pray for the conversion of sinners and to teach children about the "one true faith." Nor do at least two-thirds of Green Bay citizens who are either non-Catholic or nonbelieving agree that "The Blessed Virgin is an expression of the important bonds of family through the joining of herself with her maternal spirit to His sacrifice," or that "We as a community are filled with a generous heart for having this connection to the Virgin Mary." While you are welcome to personally believe all of the above, you are not free to use your civic office to promote your personal (and highly embarrassing) religious beliefs.

You've compounded this violation by starting a petition, "Pope to Green Bay," which appears at a website which is registered to you, www.popetogreenbay.com, and which includes an image of a Virgin Mary shrine, which is identified as "the only approved Marian Apparition Shrine in the United States." This website promotes ways to "send the Holy Father a heartfelt letter." You have also expressed the wish that the pope speak at Lambeau Field, which was generously financed by the citizens of Green Bay via a public bond.

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. A huge security operation had to be mounted in the UK for Benedict's September 2010 visit with half of the \$31 million just for security alone coming from government funds. 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 a visit from the figurehead of the 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 U.S. citizens having to literally pay to put up the pope. The shameful and unremitting scandal of sexual abuse of minors within the ranks of the Catholic clergy and even more scandalous covers-up by its highest ranking officials have tarnished dioceses through the state of Wisconsin, and left a devastated trail of victims and their families.

As you know, the Freedom From Religion Foundation was forced to sue the City of Green Bay over your unconstitutional placement and promotion of a nativity scene atop the entrance to City Hall, and we and the Constitution prevailed.

It is most unfortunate that you continue to mistake your secular position as mayor with your missionary zeal to promote and proselytize your religion to Green Bay citizens. An open records request is attached.

Yours truly

Annie Laurie Gaylor &
Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker

Dan Barker