



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • www.ffrf.org

FAXED AND MAILED February 5, 2010

Chief Alan Weatherford
Gulfport Police Department
2810 34th Avenue
Gulfport MS 39501

Dear Police Chief Weatherford:

On behalf of our members in Gulfport, Miss., as well as our 14,600 memberships nationwide, our national association, which works to enforce the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, is writing to ask that you immediately disassociate the Gulfport Police Department with “Go Haiti.”

We specifically request that, without delay, you remove from the Gulfport Police Department Web site the blurbs, links, “Go Haiti” letters and endorsement currently posted, including the invitation to “make checks payable to: Gulfport Police Chaplaincy Program,” that any checks made payable to Gulfport Police Chaplaincy Program be returned or refunded to the donor with an advisory that the Police Department is prevented by law from continuing to raise funds for this (explicitly Christian) charity, that you immediately cease any other and all fundraising activities using any Police Department or Gulfport Police chaplaincy logos, imprimatur, property, locations, events or staff—that in short, your Department remove the Gulfport Police Chaplain name and association from “Go Haiti” or any other Christian ministry and its fundraising activities now or in the future.

The “Go Haiti” letter expressly states:

“Go Forth Ministries, Gulfport Police Chaplaincy Program and Missions of Mercy Medical are planning a **Mission trip** to Haiti, March 27th thru April 2nd, to help our Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Our primary goals for this trip are to supply medical relief and **continue the construction process on the new church building.**”

The letter reveals what it calls “The Real Mission”:

“We would be remiss in our efforts to tell people about Jesus if we avoided the physical needs of the people, much less our own brothers and sisters in Christ. We must meet the physical needs as best we can. **However, it should be made clear to everyone involved, the primary goal of Go Forth Ministries is to always try and present Jesus Christ as the answer for this life and the next. We want to help our brothers and sisters in Christ and be a witness of Him to the lost.**”

Even the physical mission of “Go Haiti,” which is a project of the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church Go Forth Ministries, has a religious mission: to rebuild a pastor's church facilities, the Bethel Baptist Church in Port au Prince. The infrastructure for the church is placed

minimally at \$20,000, while the medical supplies that will supposedly be distributed once this church is built are placed at \$5,000! Fully three-quarters of the fundraising goal are expressly to build a denominational church structure—not to build a medical clinic, or a soup kitchen or dormitories for the homeless, or even to purchase tents or food or building materials for makeshift living structures, or for any other bonafide secular endeavor to actually help the people of Haiti survive!

While Go Forth Ministries is free to choose to fundraise to rebuild *a church* in the face of this national disaster, a disaster leaving millions of people starving, exposed and homeless, the Gulfport Police Department absolutely is forbidden to raise funds for or otherwise publicize fundraising for this Baptist church project, or for any other Christian ministry to Haiti.

One need not be a constitutional law scholar to understand that a police department may not collect funds for the purpose of rebuilding a church, especially for a denominational charity which makes a point of noting that its “primary goal” is proselytizing and bearing witness to Jesus Christ in the most religious country in the Western hemisphere—where 95% of the inhabitants already identify themselves as Roman Catholic!

As the U.S. Supreme Court has succinctly explained:

“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.”

Everson v. Board of Education, 30 U.S. 1 (1947)

The Constitution prohibits government endorsement of the Christian religion over nonreligion, and of religion over nonreligion. The Mississippi State Constitution likewise states that “no preference shall be given by law to any religious sect or mode of worship.”

There are innumerable secular charities in which the Gulfport Police Department could lawfully serve as a conduit to distribute money to help Haiti. The Gulfport Police Department may not instead choose to aid an overtly proselytizing Baptist organization, which cares far more about converting Roman Catholic Haitians into the Baptist denomination than in providing practical assistance.

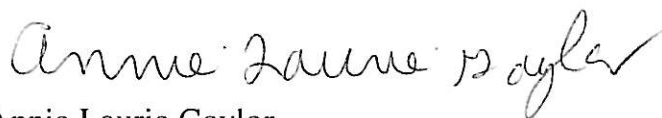
In another matter, we call your attention to the disturbing fact that the Police Chaplain page at the Gulfport Police Department Web site notes that among its duties, it offers “prayers at special occasions such as recruit graduations, award ceremonies, and dedications.” It is, of course, illegal for a public school graduation to include prayer. See *Lee v. Weisman*, 120 L.E. 2d 467/ 112 S.C.T. 2649 (1992), ruling prayers at public school graduations an impermissible establishment of religion. See also *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000), barring student-led prayers at

public school functions. It is also inappropriate for a tax-sponsored Police Department to impose official prayers at recruit graduations, award ceremonies and dedications. The Police Department may not have a religion, or make religious ritual a part of its official duties.

We ask that this passage be deleted from your Web site and any policies governing the Police Chaplains, and to hear from you in writing that Police Chaplains will be instructed not to "offer prayer" at any public function, including Gulfport Police Department functions, and will be advised that religious ritual is not permitted at public school ceremonies.

Most urgently, we seek your immediate assurance in writing that the Gulfport Police Department's current inappropriate connection with "Go Haiti" and Go Forth Ministries will be ended immediately.

Very truly

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Annie Laurie Gaylor". The signature is written in black ink and includes a checkmark at the end.

Annie Laurie Gaylor
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