

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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April 24, 2025

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [scoleman@sweethomeor.gov](mailto:scoleman@sweethomeor.gov)**

The Honorable Susan Coleman  
Mayor  
3225 Main St.  
Sweet Home, OR 97386

Re: Unconstitutional National Day of Prayer proclamation

Dear Mayor Coleman:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding the National Day of Prayer proclamation you recently issued in your capacity as Mayor. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 42,000 members across the country, including more than 1,200 members in Oregon. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned Sweet Home resident reported that you have proclaimed May 1, 2025 as an official day of prayer for the City of Sweet Home. The proclamation states, in part, that:

[T]hroughout America's history we have poured out prayers to the God of hope; in times of crisis and in celebration, in prosperity and in need, in times of war and in peace we have poured out praise to God for all He is, thanks to God for all He has done, confession and pleas for forgiveness when we have parted from His Word and will, and poured out intercession asking for His heart and hand to move for the sake of our neighbors and nation, and our history is filled with His grace, goodness, and abundant answers to those prayers [ . . . ]

I commend this observance to our citizens and request that prayers be poured out for our City.

Please see the enclosed copy of the proclamation in its entirety.

Our local complainant, who is nonreligious, further explained that they are “disappointed that our City chose to use its time and power to divide people instead of bringing them together.”

As your proclamation acknowledges, the National Day of Prayer is a sectarian event. It originated with the Reverend Billy Graham during his evangelical crusade in Washington, D.C. in 1952. He expressed an openly Christian purpose, seeking an annual prayer proclamation by the President because he wanted “the Lord Jesus Christ” to be recognized across the land.

Subsequently, the National Day of Prayer Task Force was created to “communicate with every individual the need for personal repentance and prayer, mobilizing the Christian community to intercede for America and its leadership.” The task force issues annual National Day of Prayer proclamations and submits them to the President, choosing a theme with supporting scripture from the bible. This year’s “theme” is “Pour Out to the God of Hope and Be Filled” based on the verse in Roman 15:13 that is both a prayer and a promise, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

The 2025 National Prayer for America is explicitly Christian as your own proclamation makes clear. It directly references God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The task force has a Statement of Faith that is exclusive to Christians, including that “The Holy Bible is the inspired, only, infallible, authoritative Word of The Living God” and a belief in “the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

The First Amendment requires that the government remain neutral between religion and nonreligion, and may not favor one religion over all other faiths. The Supreme Court has said time and again that the “First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. ACLU of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). By issuing an official National Day of Prayer proclamation, you abridge your duty as mayor to remain neutral. Whether to pray, and whether to believe in a god who answers prayer, is an intensely personal decision protected under our First Amendment as a matter of conscience. The government has no business telling citizens which god to pray to or that they must pray at all. This proclamation displays clear government favoritism toward religion over nonreligion, and Christianity over all other faiths.

The separation between state and church is one of the most fundamental principles of our system of government. The Supreme Court has specifically stated, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.” *W. Va. Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943). Even if the National Day of Prayer were designed to be inclusive of non-Christians, which it is not, it needlessly marginalizes and excludes citizens, such as our complainant, who are among the nearly 30 percent of adult Americans who are religiously unaffiliated, as well as the additional six percent of Americans adhering to non-Christian faiths.<sup>3</sup>

As the City’s highest elected official, you are charged with great responsibility and have been given significant trust by citizens, including those citizens who may not share your personal

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/equipping/2025-national-prayer>.

<sup>2</sup> *Statement of Faith*, NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER TASK FORCE, [www.nationaldayofprayer.org/statement\\_of\\_faith](http://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/statement_of_faith).

<sup>3</sup> Gregory A. Smith, *Religious ‘Nones’ in America: Who They Are and What They Believe*, Pew Research Center, Jan. 24, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.

religious viewpoint. Your constituents elected you to lead the City of Sweet Home, not promote your personal religion. The office of Mayor belongs to “We the people,” not the office’s temporary occupant. The Mayor’s Office and City of Sweet Home have a constitutional obligation to religious neutrality, and as a matter of policy, officially supporting the National Day of Prayer is inappropriate and unnecessary.

We urge you to withdraw this proclamation and refrain from promoting or favoring prayer and religious events in the future. We appreciate your attention to this matter, and encourage you to stand up for the constitutional principle of the separation between church and state, which unites and protects all citizens, believers and non-believers alike.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Samantha" being more prominent and the last name "Lawrence" following in a similar style.

Samantha F. Lawrence  
*Staff Attorney*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

Enclosure



## National Day of Prayer 2025 Proclamation

**WHEREAS**, throughout America's history we have poured out prayers to the God of hope; in times of crisis and in celebration, in prosperity and in need, in times of war and in peace we have poured out praise to God for all He is, thanks to God for all He has done, confession and pleas for forgiveness when we have parted from His Word and will, and poured out intercession asking for His heart and hand to move for the sake of our neighbors and nation, and our history is filled with His grace, goodness, and abundant answers to those prayers; and

**WHEREAS**, from the first prayer of our Continental Congress in 1774, to the opening of every session of the House of Representatives and Senate, and throughout hearts and homes across America, the practice of prayer continues to seek God for guidance, wisdom, power, protection, and provision that has preserved hope and united us as one nation under God; and

**WHEREAS**, The National Day of Prayer is a Public Law established in the United States Congress in 1952 approved by a Joint Resolution and amended by Congress and President Reagan with Public Law 100-307 in 1988, affirming that it is essential for us as a nation to pray and directs the President of the United States to set aside and proclaim the first Thursday of May every year as a National Day of Prayer; and

**WHEREAS**, In our city and across America the observance of the National Day of Prayer will be held on Thursday, May 1, 2025, with the theme, "Pour Out to the God of Hope and Be Filled" based on the verse in Roman 15:13 that is both a prayer and a promise, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit,"

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Susan Coleman, do hereby proclaim May 1, 2025 as a

### DAY OF PRAYER

Throughout our City and I commend this observance to our citizens and request that prayers be poured out for our City; for our neighbors as we live, serve, work, and learn together that we may be filled with all joy and peace and abound in hope.

Proclaimed this 13<sup>th</sup> Day of May, 2025.

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Mayor

ATTEST:

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City Manager - Ex Officio City Recorder