

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

June 5, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: rmarte@co.monroe.in.us

Sheriff Ruben Martí
Monroe County Sheriff's Office
301 N. College Ave.
Bloomington, IN 47404

Re: Unconstitutional promotion of religion

Dear Sheriff Martí:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation involving the Monroe County Sheriff's Office. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 41,000 members across the country, including more than 500 members in Indiana. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

We've received a report that the Sheriff's Office and Monroe County Correctional Center organized a religious event with the apparent purpose of encouraging inmates to convert to Christianity and baptising them. According to a May 31, 2026 post from the official Monroe County Sheriff's Office's Facebook page:

Recently, something powerful happened inside the Monroe County Correctional Center.

Through the leadership of Commander Kyle Gibbons, Joshua Sinn and Impossible the Movement joined Monroe County Correctional Center staff, Indiana Sheriffs' Association Executive Director Stephen Luce, and members of City Recovery to bring a message of hope, faith, and transformation.

Forty-nine individuals publicly declared their faith in Christ through baptism. Christian hip-hop artists Redeemed and J. Truth shared their testimonies and performed music that inspired and encouraged those in attendance.

The evening was marked by healing, forgiveness, accountability, and redemption. Under the leadership of Sheriff Ruben Martí, the Monroe County Correctional Center remains committed to treating every person with dignity, respect, and the belief that every life has value and purpose.

*Participation in this event was optional. All individuals pictured or featured in event photographs have signed the appropriate media release forms granting permission for the use of their image.

Additionally, a banner featuring the message “Where You at Redeemed?” along with a cross can be seen in photos of the inmate baptisms. It’s our understanding that the baptisms took place on Monroe County Correctional Center property. Please see the attached screenshots.

Further, according to the Facebook post, not only were the baptisms administered with the participation of Monroe County Correctional Center staff, they were organized and supervised by multiple people in law enforcement leadership. Some of these officials are pictured in the Facebook post in their official uniforms.

Multiple residents contacted us about constitutional concerns regarding the baptisms. Community members expressed concern with the Sheriff’s Office’s promotion of the event on its official social media. One community member explained that the inmates likely would not have felt free to refuse the baptisms or refuse participation in the event because it was clear that the Sheriff’s Office, Center, and leadership wanted inmates to attend and convert. A community member further explained that they worried about nonreligious inmates being treated worse for not participating in the religious event.

In order to comply with the First Amendment, we ask that the Office cease unconstitutionally promoting religion and encouraging or coercing inmates to participate in religious exercise or convert. While the Sheriff’s Office may reasonably accommodate inmates’ religious practices, it may not favor religion over nonreligion.

The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause prohibits the government from taking action that promotes, favors, or coerces individuals to participate in religion. The First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religions, and between religion and nonreligion. *McCreary Cnty., Ky. v. ACLU of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005). It is commendable for the Sheriff’s Office and Center to facilitate inmates freely exercising their chosen religious beliefs, but it is coercive for the Sheriff’s Office, Center, and leadership to organize, participate in, or promote religion and religious exercises, such as baptisms, in ways that make it appear the government sponsors the religious exercise and is encouraging inmates to convert to Christianity. By organizing, hosting, and promoting inmate baptisms and celebrating inmates’ conversions to Christianity on its official social media, the Sheriff’s Office is unconstitutionally favoring religion over nonreligion, and Christianity over all other faiths.

Further, a correctional facility is an inherently coercive environment and inmates and detainees are literally a captive audience. When the Sheriff’s Office entangles itself with religion and makes it clear that it’s encouraging inmates to convert to Christianity, inmates will no doubt feel pressured to convert and participate in religious activities in order to be seen as cooperative and well behaved. Inmates and detainees who are aware of the Sheriff’s Office’s promotion of Christianity will not genuinely feel free to refuse to participate in its religious activities. This is constitutionally impermissible.

We hope you agree that law enforcement must be even-handed and avoid any appearance of bias toward some citizens, and hostility toward others. The Sheriff’s Office’s employees can practice their personal religion any way they wish when acting in their personal capacities. However, they are not permitted to use the machinery of the government, and taxpayer money, to promote their

personal religion to inmates or the wider community. The Sheriff's Office's promotion of religion and conversion to Christianity needlessly marginalizes those who are among the 38 percent of Americans who are non-Christians, including the nearly one in three adult Americans who are religiously unaffiliated.¹

In order to comply with the First Amendment and to protect the rights of all inmates and detainees held in the Monroe County Correctional Center, we ask that the Monroe County Sheriff's Office immediately cease encouraging or coercing inmates to convert to Christianity and cease promoting religion within the detention facility and over its official social media channels. Please inform us in writing of the steps being taken to address these constitutional violations so that we may inform the community members who contacted us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S" and "L".

Samantha F. Lawrence
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation

SFL:trm

Enclosures

¹ Pew Research Center (2024), <http://bit.ly/3W6Cl3m>.

Monroe County Sheriff's Office's Post



Monroe County Sheriff's Office

May 31 at 8:13 PM · 🌐



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