

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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July 29, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: sdbagley@battlecreekmi.gov

Shannon Bagley
Chief of Police
Battle Creek Police Department
34 N. Division St.
Battle Creek, MI 49014

Re: Unconstitutional religious display

Dear Chief Bagley:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation at the Battle Creek Police Department. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 41,000 members across the country, including over 1,000 members in Michigan. 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 resident informs us that the Battle Creek Police Department displays a bible verse on its property, in the Police Department's public waiting room. The verse reads: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. -Matthew 5:9." The verse is displayed prominently in large lettering and is extremely visible in the waiting room.

The resident who contacted us reports how offensive and exclusionary it is to see their public police department displaying this message:

As an atheist . . . I was offended by witnessing a violation of the separation of church and state in the City of Battle Creek Michigan Police Department waiting room, but not surprised. . . . In Battle Creek Michigan, discrimination against non-Christians with Christian faith oppression is rampant and over-powering. I personally felt discriminated against when observing the bible verse on display in a government building, concerned for the bias towards atheists and those of non-Judeo-Christian Faith.

Use of religious imagery by government offices unnecessarily excludes nonbelievers and undermines confidence in the neutrality of the police department. We ask that the Department remove the religious scripture from its property.

The Supreme Court has long recognized that the First Amendment "mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary Cnty. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). Posting a bible quote on government property fails to respect this constitutional mandate of neutrality. This quote from the New Testament is explicitly and only a Christian quote. This posting promotes religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths.

Referencing the bible on government property sends the message to minority religious and nonreligious residents and Department employees “that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309–10 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)). Exclusively Christian displays marginalize community members 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

People interact with and rely on law enforcement officers during some of the most urgent and vulnerable times of their lives. Minority religious and nonreligious Battle Creek residents, like our complainant, should not be made to feel alienated, like political outsiders, because the local Police Department promotes a particular religious group’s beliefs, implying official support for Christianity.

Out of respect for the community’s diversity and the separation of state and church, we ask that the Battle Creek Police Department remove the bible verse from the Department’s public waiting room. Please inform us in writing of the steps the Department takes to address this constitutional violation so that we may inform the resident who contacted us. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Charlotte R. Gude
Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation

CRG:trm

Enclosure

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

