



March 11, 2016

Mr. Andrew Siedel
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation
P.O. Box 750
Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Re: Your February 25th letter to Orlando Mayor Dyer

Dear Mr. Siedel:

Thank you for your letter of February 25, 2016. Our office is very familiar with the case law governing legislative prayer, including the *Town of Greece v. Galloway* decision.

In that decision, the Supreme Court stated that “absent a pattern of prayers that over time denigrate, proselytize, or betray an impermissible government purpose, a challenge based solely on the content of a particular prayer will not likely establish a constitutional violation.” The Court recognized that our country has a long tradition of legislative prayer dating back to the First Congress. This tradition often helps set the tone for meetings of legislative bodies by encouraging serious consideration of the important matters coming before the body, and urging cooperation and respect by all in attendance.

The Supreme Court had previously ruled in *Marsh v. Chambers* that such prayers prior to public meetings being called to order were a legally acceptable tradition. The *Town of Greece* decision clarified that such prayers are not required to be non-sectarian. The City of Orlando’s practice has been to open the opportunity for representatives of all faiths to give the pre-Council meeting prayer. During calendar year 2015, the City of Orlando’s legislative prayer was done by representatives of many faiths including the Islamic Society of Central Florida, the Guang Ming Buddhist Temple, the Hindu Society of Central Florida, Mt. Sinai Seventh Day Adventist Church, Philip Phan Van Minh Catholic Church as well as various other Christian denominations representing all districts of our City. The City has always encouraged those volunteers to be mindful and respectful of our diverse community and we will continue to do so. We write to each of them in advance of their meeting and say, in part:

“The tradition of an opening invocation prior to the start of City Council meetings dates back to at least 1920. As the U.S. Supreme Court has recently recognized, the historical purpose of legislative prayer has been to lend gravity to the public business, remind lawmakers to transcend petty differences in pursuit of a higher purpose, and to express common aspirations for a just and peaceful society.

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Our Council has continued the tradition of beginning its meetings with prayers and reflections, but while doing so desires to honor the diversity of our community. In order to respect all our citizens, we would request that your prayer or reflection be offered in accordance with the purpose for which this time is designed, not proselytizing, advancing or disparaging any other faith or belief.”

We are very aware and respectful of the diversity of our community and those who opt not to participate in the legislative prayer that precedes the official City Council meetings. The City will continue to respect separation of church and state and its citizens’ options with respect to participation in legislative prayer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy T. Iennaco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Amy T. Iennaco
Chief Assistant City Attorney