

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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April 23, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: Randall@londonky.gov

Mayor Randall Weddle
City of London, Kentucky
501 South Main Street
London, KY 40741

Re: Unconstitutional promotion of National Day of Prayer & National Day of Prayer
breakfast

Dear Mayor Weddle:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring with the City of London. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 40,000 members across the country, including over 300 members and a chapter in Kentucky. 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 community member informs us that you are hosting a “Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast” on May 2, 2024, at the London Community Center for the National Day of Prayer. The City’s official social media and website confirm this.¹ The City advertises its event with a digital flier that describes the event as “[a]n opportunity for our community to come together over breakfast and join in prayer for our city and its leaders. Let us strengthen our bonds, seek guidance, and renew our commitment to serving the greater good.” Please see the enclosed screenshot.

We ask that you refrain from participating in a sectarian event in your official capacity. We also ask that the City refrain from promoting a sectarian event.

As you are likely aware, the National Day of Prayer is a sectarian event.² It originated with Rev. Billy Graham during his evangelical crusade in Washington, D.C. in 1952. He expressed an openly Christian purpose, seeking an annual 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 . . . and to mobilize the Christian community to intercede for America’s leaders and its families.” The website falsely proclaims that the National Day of Prayer “is a day that transcends differences, bringing together citizens from all backgrounds.”

Promoting a National Day of Prayer poses constitutional concerns. The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause prohibits the government from running or promoting a religious event. As

¹ <https://www.londonky.gov/event/mayors-prayer-breakfast/>.

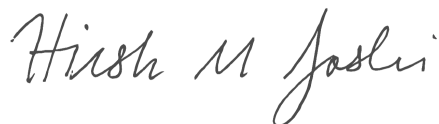
² <https://www.nationaldayofprayer.org/about>.

the Supreme Court has held, the Establishment Clause “mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cnty., Ky. 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 Ed. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). By proclaiming a day of prayer and sharing this on official social media, you not only promote religion, but specifically promote Christianity.

We ask that the City drop its support for this divisive, evangelistic vision for America and cease holding a National Day of Prayer event. You serve a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also atheists and agnostics who do not believe in prayer. Inviting City residents to “join in prayer” does not actually “strengthen bonds;” instead, the City “sends a message to. . . nonadherents 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, 310 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)). By participating in a prayer breakfast, you lend your title to a religious message and send an official message that excludes non-Christians, including the nearly thirty percent of the American population who are nonreligious.³ Officials are elected to provide leadership, not run religious events.

The City and its government officials have a constitutional obligation to religious neutrality. This obligation is violated when the City coordinates and promotes an exclusionary National Day of Prayer. Please respond in writing with the actions taken to respect the rights of conscience of all London residents so that we may inform our complainant. Thank you for your time and attention.


Sincerely,



Hirsh M. Joshi
Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosure

³ 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/>.



MAYOR'S PRAYER BREAKFAST
WITH
MAYOR RANDALL WEDDLE
AND THE CITY OF LONDON

**An opportunity for our community to come together
over breakfast and join in prayer for our city and its leaders.
Let us strengthen our bonds, seek guidance,
and renew our commitment to serving the greater good.**

MAY 2ND AT 7^{AM}
LONDON COMMUNITY CENTER