



9 May 2014

SENT VIA MAIL & EMAIL
mayor@ocfl.net

The Honorable Teresa Jacobs
County Administrative Center
201 S. Rosalind Avenue
Orlando, FL 32801-3547

Re: Invocation Request

Dear Mayor Jacobs:

The Central Florida Freethought Community is a local educational organization of more than two hundred members, many of whom reside in Orange County. We are a chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and an affiliate of the American Humanist Association.

One of the organization's objectives is to educate the public on the need for equal treatment of non-believers and the value of Humanism; a world view which relies on reason and science as the best decision-making tools humankind has at its disposal. To this end, we have recently participated with members of the Interfaith Council of Central Florida in a discussion series, *Religion 201*, at the Holocaust Memorial and Resource Education Center in Maitland. Alongside clergy and religious leaders of many faiths our members represented Humanism.

In the recent Supreme Court decision, *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the Court emphasized that a government's prayer practice must be "nondiscriminatory" and it must make reasonable efforts to include invocations from all members of the community, regardless of their faith. Note that Humanism is recognized as a religion under the First Amendment in numerous cases¹ and excluding a particular faith group from consideration is unconstitutional.²

In light of these facts, it is clear that local government meetings should include Humanist invocations as well as those from any other religious minorities. Therefore, **we respectfully request the opportunity to offer invocations at your meetings.**

With one-fifth of the U.S. population and one-third of all adults under the age of 30 identifying themselves as "none" (i.e. *none of the above*) according to the Pew Research Center in 2012, our request presents an opportunity for the Orange County Board of County Commissioners to demonstrate that it seeks to celebrate diversity with its actions and does not discriminate on the basis of religion. Additionally, you will be providing your Humanist and other non-religious constituents with a voice and an equal opportunity to be included in the ceremonial portion of business meetings on a regular basis.



We request that you notify us in writing at your earliest convenience about the next opportunity for us to offer the invocation at an upcoming meeting. If you require, we can identify persons in Orange County to offer this invocation who are endorsed by The Humanist Society, a religious organization, or who are otherwise ordained and accorded the same rights and privileges granted by law to traditional clergy.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D Williamson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Williamson
Founder and Chair

¹ See, e.g., *Gillette v. U.S.*, 401 U.S. 437, 439, 461-62 (1971) (entertaining free exercise claim “based on a humanist approach to religion”); *U.S. v. Seeger*, 380 U.S. 163, 176 (1965); *Torasco v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488, 495 n.11 (1961) (“Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, [and] Secular Humanism” are “religions”); *Newdow v. United States Cong.*, 313 F.3d 500, 504 n.2 (9th Cir. 2002) (“recognized religions exist that do not teach a belief in God, e.g., secular humanism.”); *U.S. v. Ward*, 989 F.2d 1015, 1017-18 (9th Cir. 1993) (many “believe in a purely personal God, some in a supernatural deity; others think of religion as a way of life envisioning as its ultimate goal the day when all men can live together in perfect understanding and peace.”) (citations omitted); *Grove v. Mead School Dist.*, 753 F.2d 1528, 1534 (9th Cir. 1985); *Smith v. Board of Sch. Comm’rs*, 827 F.2d 684, 689 (11th Cir. 1987); *Chess v. Widmar*, 635 F.2d 1310, 1318 n.10 (8th Cir. 1980) (“Secular Humanism” is a “religion”); *In re Weitzman*, 426 F.2d 439, 457 & n.5 (8th Cir. 1970); *U.S. v. Meyers*, 906 F. Supp. 1494, 1499-1500 (D. Wyo. 1995); *Crockett v. Sorenson*, 568 F. Supp. 1422, 1425 (W.D. Va. 1983); *ACLU v. Eckels*, 589 F. Supp. 222, 227 (S.D. Tex. 1984); *In re “E”*, 59 N.J. 36, 55 n.4 (N.J. 1971); *Welker v. Welker*, 24 Wis. 2d 570, 575-76 (Wis. 1964); *Fellowship of Humanity v. County of Alameda*, 153 Cal. App. 2d 673 (1st Dist. 1957).

² See, *Pelphrey v. Cobb County*, 547 F.3d 1263, 1276 (11th Cir. 2008).