

GUIDELINES FOR INVOCATIONS

The Newport Beach City Council has a long tradition of beginning each City Council meeting with a pledge of allegiance and an invocation. Recently, the United States Supreme Court in *Town of Greece v. Galloway* 134 S.Ct. 1811 (2014) held that “absent a pattern of prayers that over time denigrate, proselytize, or betray an impermissible government purpose...” a prayer policy passes constitutional muster. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that invocations comply with the law so that the City’s residents retain the right to open public meetings with words of inspiration and wisdom. The City Council has determined that invocations that comply with the guidelines in this Policy are consistent with the United States Supreme Court’s jurisprudence.

1. To solemnize proceedings of the City Council, Boards, Commissions and Committees, it is the policy of the City Council to allow for an invocation or prayer to be offered at its meetings for the benefit of the City Council, Board members, Commission members, Committee members and the community.
2. No member of the City Council, members of any City Board, Commission, Committee or City employee or any other person in attendance at the meeting shall be required to participate in any prayer that is offered.
3. The prayer shall be voluntarily delivered by a clergy/religious leader or other person in the City of Newport Beach. To ensure that such person (“invocational speaker”) is selected from among a wide pool of the City’s leaders, on a rotating basis, the invocational speaker shall be selected according to the following procedure:
 - a. The City Clerk shall compile and maintain a database (“Congregations List”) of the religious congregations with an established presence in Newport Beach.
 - b. The Congregations List shall be compiled by referencing the listing for “churches,” “congregations,” or other religious assemblies [religious, atheist or agnostic groups or assemblies (collectively “Assemblies”)] in the annual Yellow Pages phone book(s) published for the City of Newport Beach, research from the Internet, and consultation with local chambers of commerce. All religious congregations and Assemblies with an established presence in the local community of Newport Beach are eligible to be

included in the Congregations List, and any such congregation can confirm its inclusion by written request to the City Clerk.

- c. The Congregations List shall also include the name and contact information of any chaplain who may serve one (1) or more of the fire departments or law enforcement agencies of the City of Newport Beach or any nearby military facilities.
- d. The Congregations List shall be updated, by reasonable efforts of the City Clerk, in November of each calendar year.
- e. Within thirty (30) calendar days of the effective date of this Policy, and on or about December 1 of each calendar year thereafter, the City Clerk shall mail an invitation addressed to the “congregation leader” of each congregation listed on the Congregations List, as well as to the individual chaplains included on the Congregations List.
- f. The invitation shall be dated at the top of the page, signed by the City Clerk at the bottom of the page, and read as follows:

Dear Congregation Leader,

The City Council makes it a policy to invite members of the clergy in the City of Newport Beach to voluntarily offer a prayer before the beginning of its meetings. As the leader of one of the congregations with an established presence in the local community of the City of Newport Beach, or in your capacity as a chaplain for one of the fire departments or law enforcement agencies of the City of Newport Beach, the City Council would appreciate if you would consider offering this important service at an upcoming meeting of the City Council, City Board, Commission, or Committee.

If you are willing to assist the City in this regard, please send a written reply via E-mail, fax or mail to the City Clerk. Invocations are scheduled on a first-come, first-serve or other random basis. The dates of the City Council's scheduled meetings for the upcoming year are listed on the following, attached page. Please note, meetings of the City's Boards, Commissions, and Committees are held throughout the year. If you have a preference among the dates, please state that request in your written reply.

This opportunity is voluntary, and you are free to offer the invocation according to the dictates of your own conscience. To maintain a spirit of respect and ecumenism, the City Council requests only that the prayer opportunity not be exploited as an effort to convert others to the particular faith of the invocational speaker, nor to disparage any faith or belief different than that of the invocational speaker.

On behalf of the City Council, I thank you in advance for considering this invitation.

Sincerely,

City Clerk

- g. Consistent with paragraph 6 hereof and, as the invitation letter indicates, the respondents to the invitation shall be scheduled on a first-come, first-served or other random basis to deliver invocations.
 - h. If the selected invocational speaker does not appear at the scheduled meeting, the Mayor (or board, commission, committee chairperson) may ask for a volunteer from among the City Council (or Board, Commission, Committee) or the audience to deliver the invocation.
4. No invocational speaker shall receive compensation for his or her service.
 5. The City Clerk shall make every reasonable effort to ensure that a variety of eligible invocational speakers are scheduled for the City Council meetings. If others are waiting and have not had an opportunity to deliver an invocation, no invocational speaker shall be scheduled to offer a prayer at more than three (3) City Council, Board, Commission or Committee meetings in any calendar year.
 6. Neither the City Council, Board, Commission, or Committee members, nor the City Clerk shall engage in any prior inquiry, review of, or involvement in, the content of any prayer to be offered by an invocational speaker.
 7. This Policy shall be intended for all Boards, Commissions, Committees, or any other public event of the City of Newport Beach, California.
 8. This Policy is not intended, and shall not be implemented or construed in any way, to affiliate the City Council with, nor express the City Council's preference for, any faith or religious denomination. Rather, this Policy is intended to

acknowledge and express the City Council's respect for the diversity of religious denominations and faiths represented and practiced among the citizens of Newport Beach.

History

Adopted A-19 - 1-27-2004

Amended A-19 - 4-25-2017