



FACT SHEET

Joyner v. Forsyth County

ABOUT THE CASE

In March 2007, the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State sued the Forsyth County Commission on behalf of three individuals because they claimed to be offended by simply hearing the invited speakers deliver prayers that included a reference to Jesus Christ or any other named deity. The two groups filed the lawsuit because they claimed the board—represented by the Alliance Defending Freedom—“does not have a policy which discourages or prohibits those whom [the board] has invited to deliver prayers from including references to Jesus Christ, or any other sectarian deity, as part of their prayers.” A federal district court eventually issued an order against the county’s prayer practice. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit upheld the district court’s order in 2011. Although the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the case, the high court upheld a similar policy from the town of Greece, N.Y., on May 5, 2014, and affirmed that Americans are free to pray according to their own beliefs at public meetings. In light of that, ADF attorneys filed a motion with the district court that asks it to lift its order so that uncensored prayers can resume in Forsyth County.

STATUS AS OF 2014-11-19

On Nov. 20, 2014, the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina will hold oral arguments on the ADF motion to lift the court’s previous order.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The liberty of community members to pray before public meetings according to their consciences and without being censored, just as the U.S. Supreme Court again affirmed just this year.

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ABOUT Alliance Defending Freedom

Alliance Defending Freedom is an alliance-building, non-profit legal organization that advocates for the right of people to freely live out their faith.

ABOUT Brett Harvey

Brett Harvey serves as senior counsel with Alliance Defending Freedom, where he leads the Grants and Funding team. Harvey has assisted state and local governments on issues involving public invocations, and he has successfully represented clients in defense of their First Amendment freedoms and the right to life. He earned his J.D. from the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University in Georgia in 1995. He is admitted to the bar in the states of Georgia, Florida, Colorado, and Arizona. Harvey has also been admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court; the U.S. Courts of Appeal for the 6th, 9th, 10th, and 11th Circuits; and the U.S. District Court in Colorado. He joined Alliance Defending Freedom in 2000 and has been practicing law since 1995.