

CITY OF CONNERSVILLE
CITY COUNCIL AND BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS

INVOCATION POLICY

POLICY NO. _____

BACKGROUND

The City of Connersville, like our nation, has a longstanding legislative prayer tradition as a part of its City Council meeting and Board of Public Works meetings. The City Council and Board of Public Works is the intended audience of the invocation and has been limited to the beginning of meetings. The invocation portion of the agenda is meant to serve as a "legislative prayer". Prior to the adoption of this policy, the invocation was given on an informal basis.

I PURPOSE

This policy is intended to provide criteria, guidelines, and procedures for a religious invocation to be offered at City Council meetings and Board of Public Works meetings in order to solemnize the proceedings of the City Council and Board of Public Works, and to ensure the City's practice of allowing an invocation is in compliance with Supreme Court rulings. As such, secular invocations are not permitted.

II SCOPE

This policy affects elected officials and the regular council meeting schedule of the Connersville City Council and the regular meeting of the Board of Public Works.

III RESPONSIBILITIES

The City Administrator or their designee is responsible for the implementation and update of this policy. The City Council and Board of Public Works is responsible for the enforcement of this policy.

IV TIMING

After the " Call to Order" and approval of the city council and Board of Public Works agenda of all regular meetings of the City Council and Board of Public Works, an opening invocation as described herein shall occur followed directly by the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. The opening invocation and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance will occur and be completed during the opening, ceremonial portion of the city council meeting and shall in no event occur, or be construed to occur, during the policymaking or legislative portions of the city council meeting.

V POLICY

The City Council and Board of Public Works, in relation to the invocation, invites and welcomes the religious leaders of any and all local religions, including but not limiting to ministers, priests, chaplains, rabbis, deacons, clerics, imams, elders, and the like (hereinafter Invocation Speakers")

to participate in providing invocations for the City Council and Board of Public Works. The following shall apply as the City's policy when it comes to the invocation.

A. No member of the City Council or Board of Public Works, employee of the City, any city consultant, or any other person in attendance at the meeting shall be required to participate in any invocation that is offered, and their presence, or lack thereof, when the invocation is delivered will have no impact on their observation or participation in any aspect of the meeting, nor shall be grounds for any censure or removal from the council or employee discipline. It is also not appropriate to suggest that a council member, or anyone in attendance at the meeting, who is uncomfortable with the invocation or who wishes not to participate should leave during that portion of the meeting.

B. The invocation shall be voluntarily delivered by an eligible member of the clergy or religious leader within Fayette County. To ensure that such person is selected from among a wide pool of religious leaders in the community, on a rotating basis, the Invocation Speaker will be selected according to the procedure noted in Section VI below.

C. No invocation speaker shall receive compensation for his or her service.

D. Speakers should not proselytize or otherwise promote any doctrine, faith, belief, or dogma; advocate or campaign for conversion of individuals or groups or threaten damnation. No invocation shall intentionally disparage the religious faith or non-religious views of others.

E. Invocation should not exceed 3 minutes in length.

F. This policy is not intended, and shall not be implemented or construed in any way, to affiliate the City Council or Board of Public Works with, nor express the City Council or Board of Public Work's preference for, any faith, belief, non-belief, opinion, religion, non-religion, or religious denomination or lack thereof. Rather, this policy is intended to acknowledge and express the City Council and Board of Public Work's respect for the diversity of religious denominations and non-religious denominations, and faiths and beliefs represented and practiced among the citizens of Connersville.

G. Neither the City Council, Board of Public Works, nor staff shall engage in any inquiry, examination, restriction, review of, or involvement in the content of any invocation being offered. Statements reflecting ideals relating to peace and security for the city and nation; safety of our armed forces, police, firefighters and emergency service personnel; wisdom for the lawmakers; and justice for the people are encouraged. The City Council and Board of Public Works asks that prayer givers be sensitive to the diversity of faiths and beliefs represented throughout the community.

H. If the selected invocation speaker does not appear at the scheduled meeting, the Mayor may skip the invocation or call for a moment of silence in special situations.

I. The written agenda document created for the City Council and Board of Public Works meeting will have the following disclaimer:

The invocation is a voluntary expression of the private citizen, to and for the City Council, and is not intended to affiliate the City Council and Board of Public Works with, or express the City Council's and Board of Public Works preference for; any religious/spiritual organization. The views or beliefs expressed by the invocation speaker have not been previously reviewed or approved by the Council, the Board, or staff.

J. Anyone violating this policy is subject to disqualification from offering future invocations and will be removed from the database of religious/spiritual leaders or organizations eligible to give the invocation.

VI SELECTION AND SCHEDULING OF SPEAKERS

The invocation shall be voluntarily delivered by an eligible religious leader within the county of Fayette. To ensure that such person (invocation speaker) is selected from among a wide pool of the county religious leaders, on a rotating basis, the invocation speaker will be selected in accordance with these rules.

A. The City Administrator or their designee shall compile and maintain a database of the religious congregations (" Congregations List") with an established presence within Fayette County.

B. The Congregations List shall be compiled examining a broad and diverse pool of religious leaders and other representatives of any and all local religions, including but not limiting to ministers, priests, chaplains, rabbis, deacons, clerics, imams, elders, and the like. The database may be compiled by referencing the list for " churches", " congregations", or other religious assemblies in the annual Yellow Pages phone book(s) published for the City of Connersville, " worship service listing" from the local newspaper, research from the internet, consultation with local chambers of commerce or comparable organizations, and any other effective method in the discretion of the City Administrator or their designee. Any such church, congregation, religious assembly, within the jurisdictional limits of Fayette County not identified within the database for participation may request inclusion within the database by written communication to the City Administrator that references the opening invocation. In addition, any individual that previously held the status as required under this ordinance, but is now retired, and desires to give a religious invocation may be deemed eligible.

C. Should a question arise as to the authenticity of a church, congregation, a religious assembly, other religious group, the City Administrator shall refer to criteria used by the Internal Revenue Service in its determination of those organizations that would legitimately qualify for Section 501(c) 3 tax- exempt status.

D. In recognition of the invocation being for the purpose of the City Council and Board of Public Works, a city council member may invite a guest from within or outside the community to provide the invocation. The council member shall provide the guest speaker with a copy of this policy and guidelines for their review.

E. The database is compiled and used for the purposes of logistics, efficiency, and equal opportunity for all religious leaders within Fayette County who choose whether to respond to the City Council's and Board of Public Works invitation.

F. The Congregations List shall be updated, by reasonable efforts of the City Administrator or their designee, in September or October of each calendar year. However, as provided in Section VI (B & C & E), names may be added to the list at any time by written request to the City Administrator.

G. Within ninety (90) days of the effective date of this policy, and on or about November 1 of each calendar year thereafter, the City Administrator or their designee shall mail an invitation addressed to the leader (Invocation Speaker) of each individual on the Congregation List. The invitation shall be dated at the top of the page, signed by the City Administrator, and read as follows:

Dear Leader or Representative,

The Connersville City Council and Board of Public Works invites and welcomes religious leaders of any and all local religions, including but not limiting to ministers, priests, chaplains, rabbis, deacons, clerics, imams, and elders within Fayette County to voluntarily offer a religious invocation before the beginning of its regular city council and Board of Public Works meetings.

As the leader of one of the religious assemblies in the community, you are eligible to offer this service at an upcoming meeting of the City Council and Board of Public Works. This opportunity is voluntary and if you are interested in offering the invocation, please send a written reply at your earliest convenience to the Mayor's Office at the Connersville City Hall, 500 N. Central Ave., Connersville, IN 47331, or by email.

Invocation speakers are scheduled on a first-come, first-served or other random selection basis. The dates of the City Council's and Board of Public Works scheduled meetings for the upcoming year are listed on the following, attached page. If you have a preference among the dates, please state that request in your reply.

To assist you, the following basic guidelines are offered. In addition, a copy of the City Council's and the Board of Public Work's policy regarding invocations is attached for your information.

- 1. City Council meetings start at 7:30 p.m. The Board of Public Works meetings start at 1:00 p.m.*
- 2. The City Council and Board of Public Works is the intended audience, not those in attendance or viewing at home.*
- 3. To maintain a spirit of respect and ecumenism, the City Council and Board of Public Works requests only that the invocation opportunity not be used as an effort to convert others to the particular faith of the invocation speaker; nor used to disparage any faith or belief or nonreligious view different than that of the invocation speaker.*

4. Statements reflecting ideals relating to peace and security for the city and nation; safety of our armed forces, police, firefighters and emergency service personnel; wisdom for lawmakers; and justice for the people are encouraged.

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

Sincerely,

City Administrator

H. The respondents to the invitation will be scheduled on a first -come, first -served or other random selected basis to deliver the invocations.

I. In December of each year, the City Administrator or their designee will present the calendar of scheduled Invocation Speakers for regular City Council and Board of Public Works meetings for the upcoming year to be approved by the City Council. Any spots left vacant may be filled by the City Council and Board of Public Works according to Section VI (E) above; left vacant to be filled at a later time; or simply left open and unfilled (meaning no invocation will be given).

VII EFFECTIVE DATE

This policy shall become effective immediately following the adoption of it by the City Council.

Approval Date: _____