

From: Mike Gafa <mike@rcagl.org>
Date: March 17, 2021 at 1:39:24 PM EDT
To: Will Bunek <wbunek@leelanau.gov>
Subject: Prayer ...

Hello Will,

I am currently under contract to serve Glen Lake Community Reformed Church as lead pastor. However, what I offer here is completely independent of the church, and only represents my personal viewpoint - not the church's.

I was contacted yesterday regarding the possibility of sending a note of support for a brief time of prayer in county board meetings. Obviously, as a pastor - and more to the point as a Christian - I place a high, high value on prayer.

For this reason, I believe the question of whether to pray - and how to pray, and to Whom to pray for that matter - should be considered carefully.

If there is a desire on the part of the Board for audible public prayer, I would strongly recommend that the Lord's Prayer be the *only* prayer used. Written prayers can easily slide into partisanship and become agenda-focused (on an issue, on a personal area of passion, etc.).

Having said that, if you did go the route of formal and audible prayer, it would need to be expressly stated that participation is entirely optional. Not everyone would partake, and no one should be made to pray if that is not part of their own belief system. The danger, of course, is that some may actually politicize non-participation ("____ doesn't even join us in prayer during our meetings. How can you possibly vote for him/her?").

This leads into another aspect to consider: If audible, formal prayer is allowed, what will the Board's response be when (not if, but when) someone, at some point, asks for a prayer specific to his or her beliefs? The Board would need to be ready to respond with a well thought out answer, one that does not shut down religion or religious beliefs (First Amendment) but acknowledges them. Needless to say, this would be a concern as well (at least as I see it).

With all of that said, if I were to make a recommendation it would be this: Allow around one minute at each meeting for people to pray silently as they are led, acknowledging that faith is a vital aspect for many people, but not for all people. This approach *does* allow for prayer, but does not mandate prayer, or dictate who prays what, or to Whom.

I realize that you have not asked for my opinion, and I certainly do not want to infringe on you or the Board! You all have enough to focus on. But since I was asked, I felt that the only way I could respond was with honesty and integrity, sharing my perspective somewhat comprehensively.

Regardless of where you all go with this, I wish you, and the Board, all the best.

Mike Gafa

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