

**From:** Jennie Berkson <[jeberkson@me.com](mailto:jeberkson@me.com)>  
**Sent:** Friday, May 14, 2021 3:34 PM  
**To:** Michelle Crocker <[mcrocker@leelanau.gov](mailto:mcrocker@leelanau.gov)>  
**Subject:** Prayers at Board of Commissioner meetings

Dear Ms. Crocker, please forward this letter to each of the Leelanau County Commissioners. Thank you.

I am writing about the policy regarding opening prayers at Board of Commissioner meetings. I would like to say, to begin with, that I do not think it is appropriate, or necessary to begin the Board of Commissioner meetings with a prayer and have stated so in earlier communications.

However, the Board has indicated by a narrow margin that this is their will and, respecting the democratic process, I accept this current reality. Given that, I would like to take this opportunity to provide some guidance as to the implementation of this action.

The policy stipulates that all religious congregations with an established presence in Leelanau County are eligible to be included in the official "Congregation List". If an "established presence" means a physical building in the County, then the prayers from many faiths with members who live in the County will be excluded.

For example, I and many of the Jews who live in Leelanau County are members of Temple Beth Shalom which has a synagogue in Traverse City. The Congregation has been in existence since 1885 and serves the five county region. Given the small size of the five county Jewish community, it makes no sense to have a physical presence in each county. Further, Jewish worship can and does take place outside of the synagogue. As a matter of fact, Temple Beth Shalom is gathering in Elmwood Township this Saturday afternoon for worship and to celebrate the end of the Sabbath. It is very common for Jewish worship to occur in homes and anywhere Jews gather.

I ask that you amend the proposed policy as follows:

- Add language in section 2: This policy recognizes that not all religious faiths of Leelanau residents conduct services in Leelanau County, such as, but not limited to, Jews, Unitarians and Muslims. Hence, clergy, outside of Leelanau County, with congregants in Leelanau County, shall be included and invited to offer prayer before the beginning of its Board meetings. Congregant is defined as a person who is a member of a congregation.
- Replace references to "clergy members of Leelanau County" with "clergy members with congregants in Leelanau County".

People of many faiths make their home in Leelanau County. Whether their faith has a building or address in the County or not, it doesn't mean the faith doesn't have a presence, and hence they should be included in the official Congregation List used by the Board of Commissioners for the purpose of providing a prayer at the start of meetings.

Respectfully, and with the hopes that you will also show respect for all in our community,

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