

New policy examines public prayer issues, needs

Editor's note: The following is the verbatim policy on prayer at community functions that was drafted by the Farmington-Farmington Hills Ministerial Association.

Introduction:

As part of certain civic functions in our community, people planning such events will occasionally invite a member of the clergy to offer prayer. Recognizing heightened sensitivities by the ever-increasing multi-cultural and racial-ethnic populations that reside in our community and the variety of religious expressions represented by members of the Farmington-Farmington Hills clergy, ascertaining what kinds of public prayer are helpful to community building, while not compromising the clergy is becoming an increasingly complex issue for both members of the community and the clergy. This paper is an attempt to raise the issues public prayer presents in our community at this time.

The roots of the issue:

When the United States was a more self-consciously religious nation and the nation's civil religion was dictated first by mainline Protestantism and later joined by Roman Catholicism, public prayer, addressed to a Trinitarian or Trinitarian deity (God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit) was overwhelmingly accepted. As religious, ethnic and cultural diversity has increased over the decades, more and more people find themselves excluded from such prayers. Others, who profess not to believe in any supreme being, find any form of prayer offensive and an abridgement of their civil rights.

Public prayer raises a variety of issues for clergy as well. Some clergy view themselves and their institutions as part of the fabric of the community. Therefore, praying at public events is consistent with their understanding of their personhood and role as representatives of their institution.

Other clergy, with a different personal or institutional focus, do not believe public prayers are within the purview of their calling or feel they are constrained from expressing fully their religious convictions when they offer prayer in a public setting. Still others believe public prayer is appropriate at some functions but not at others.

Philosophical Guidelines:

The first question to be ascertained is what is the purpose of prayer in a civic (non-religious) setting? If it is to lift up commonalities derived from an agreed upon

supreme being, this may be reason enough for a clergyman to offer public prayer. Conversely, if public prayer divides the assembled or compromises either the person praying or the people prayed over, we believe it should be avoided.

Practical guidelines:

For groups thinking about having prayer as part of an event:

- Groups will do well to ask, why are we having a prayer at this event? Does it stem from an unexamined tradition? From sentimentality? Or is it from some deep-seated conviction?

- Groups will serve best the event's purpose, those expected to attend and the clergyman who is invited to offer prayer, by explaining their motives for prayer, the event's focus, the audience and their overall

expectations of the clergyman they wish to have offer prayer.

For clergy considering offering prayer as part of an event:

- Clergy will do well to ask the questions posed above of the group's organizers from one's particular viewpoint as a clergyman.

- If clergy are unwilling to participate, a well-reasoned and articulate statement of why not could very well be a helpful educational tool for community groups as they grapple with whether or not a public prayer by an area clergyman is consistent with their organization's purpose for being, the specific event's purpose, the appropriateness of public prayer at civic gatherings and the role of clergy in the community.

Clergy from page 1A

"We felt uneasy for those whose beliefs were outside what was being exposed," Gere said. "The clergy asked, 'how can we be helpful?' We believe we should be reconciled to those people we have offended."

The policy represents the growing awareness by clergy of the diversity of religious, cultural and ethnic groups living in the Farmington area.

Paul, Gere and Duncan are quick to point out that the policy doesn't necessarily represent each clergy member's individual viewpoint.

Duncan, for example, makes it clear he feels it would be a sad day if all prayer is lost at what might be appropriate functions or events.

"We shouldn't pick the least line of resistance — to just stop prayer,"

he said. "We have to wrestle with it. We can't just throw it away. To my way of thinking, it would be sad."

The clergy is wrestling with time-honored traditions where prayers were said at all types of functions, including public breakfasts, banquets, ground-breakings and ball games, the clergy said.

"When the church (First United in the 1830s) was first dedicated, there used to be a handful of trinitarian churches in the area," Duncan said. "It (public prayer) was just natural."

But Paul speaks of separation of church and state.

"It was just as illegal then as it is now. But no one questioned it then," she said. "I would see a clear separation of these events. Take the

dedication of a school or a factory. I myself do not see a need for it. I recognize it's a tradition. But we need to re-adapt and be more sensitive."

Too often, she continued, prayer accompanied events, such as a ball game or community breakfast, because it lends credibility to the event. "I have trouble with that."

While some members of the clergy need to use trinitarian language in prayer, others don't necessarily. "It's really a tricky question," Duncan said.

No longer can clergy assume people in any given audience share the same beliefs. "With a multicultural and ethnic community, these are no longer assumptions. I would say

that is wonderful. Unconscious prayer is not prayer," Gere said. But Duncan adds: "Nor shall it

(prayer) be thrown out. We will miss it. In some events, it almost begs for it."

GREENERY

Extended Care Center

Compassionate, quality nursing care in a newly renovated, home-like atmosphere

Full Activity Schedule - Seven Days A Week
Medicare Certified

Please call 477-7373 for more information or to arrange a facility tour.
Let us demonstrate how we may successfully meet your needs.

Greenery Extended Care Center
34225 Grand River Avenue
Farmington, MI 48335
(Between Farmington & Drake Roads)

Insulation Special

6" R-14 Fiberglass Blown In Attic Insulation

1,000 Sq. Ft. - \$325
JONES INSULATION
348-9880

FREE G.E.D. FREE

Take the Time!

6 Week and 15 Week Programs
Classes Begin Sept. 28

DON'T WAIT! CALL
592-3376

Redford Union Schools
Continuing Adult Education

Flowers Say What the Heart is too Full to Express

English Gardens
Specializing in Sympathy Flowers
Dearborn Heights • 565-8133
West Bloomfield • 951-7506
Clinton Township • 286-6100

Farmington Observer

USPS 187-840
Published every Monday and Thursday by Observer & Economic Newspapers, 805 E. Main, Farmington, MI 48335-0910. Second-class postage paid at Farmington, MI 48009-0910. Postmaster: Send address changes to Observer & Economic, 805 E. Main, Farmington, MI 48009-0910. Telephone 344-1114.
Subscription Rates: \$35.40 (1 year) (includes postage and handling)
Single Copies: \$0.50 (includes postage and handling)
All advertising published in the Farmington Observer is subject to the conditions stated in the Advertiser's Guide, copies of which are available from the advertising department, 21300 Farmington Road, Farmington, MI 48335-0111. 477-5450. The Farmington Observer reserves the right not to accept an advertiser's order or to suspend or cancel an order at any time without notice. Advertisers have no authority to bind this newspaper and any publication of an advertisement is subject to the final acceptance of the advertiser's order.

ITALIA 92

MEET ITALIAN DESIGNER
FRANCO MIRABELLI

Friday, September 25
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Collection Sportswear
Birmingham

Select from our in-stock collection and chat with the man who designs menswear inspired fashions for the woman who enjoys being feminine. Sophisticated, well-tailored pattern mixes in marvelous fabrics. Sizes 4 to 14.

Jacobson's

EXPERIENCE THE TREASURES OF ITALY

Register to win a one week trip for two to Italy. Visit Milan, Florence, Venice. Air flight courtesy of American Airlines.
Six nights' accommodations courtesy of LNT Associates. Pick up your official entry form at your nearest Jacobson's store.



BOTSFORD GENERAL HOSPITAL



Welcome Home.

The Botsford family wants you to feel right at home. If you don't have a regular physician, we'd like to help you with our free physician referral service called Health Match. Just call 442-7900 and we'll match you with a physician to meet your needs. When you move to a new neighborhood, it's a good idea to

know where you should go in an emergency. Botsford's Emergency/Urgent Care Department treats both life-threatening and minor injuries. At Botsford we strive to give you the best care as efficiently as possible. All of us at Botsford hope you are enjoying your new home and welcome you to the neighborhood.



botsford general hospital

Reaching out to the people of our community.

24050 Grand River Avenue • Farmington Hills, MI 48335-5035

Save valuable time in an emergency by pre-registering. For an Emergency/Urgent Care form or more information, please call Community Relations at 442-7986.

ANN ARBOR • GROSSE POINTE • BIRMINGHAM • DEARBORN • ROCHESTER • LIVONIA

Shop until 9 p.m. on Thursday and Friday, until 6 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.

Shop Sunday Noon to 5 p.m. Jacobson's Charge, MasterCard, VISA, and American Express®.