

## **Christian National Day of Prayer Event In Front of Troy City Hall Finally Approved After Thomas More Law Center Enters Fray**

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Troy, MI -- The Troy City Council finally approved a Christian group's application to hold their National Day of Prayer event in front of City Hall after the Thomas More Law Center stepped in on behalf of the group to end months of political maneuverings, contentious hearings and opposition from non-Christians.

Christians have been sponsoring a National Day of Prayer event in front of City Hall for the past ten years. Yet, when this year's application was submitted by the Troy National Day of Prayer Christian Task Force, city administrators attempted to force them to make it an interfaith event. Without notifying the Task Force coordinator Lori Wagner, the application was altered and placed on the Council's agenda. When Wagner discovered the change she immediately asked that the altered application be removed and the original resubmitted. The Council subsequently rejected the resubmitted application.

Christians encouraged and supported separate events for other faith groups on the same day and place, but at different times. Nevertheless, they wanted their own Christian event, as they had for the previous ten years. It was evident that some city officials were trying to force Christians to change their message by refusing to grant them a permit unless they allowed prayers from people of different religions.

"Some politicians on the council wanted to dilute the Christian message under the pretext of diversity," commented Richard Thompson, Chief Counsel of the Law Center. "However, Christian persistence overcame their political maneuverings and opposition from interfaith advocates. We won this battle, but I am concerned there will be future attempts to stop Christians from celebrating this event, and we must stay vigilant and be ready to challenge those efforts in court," he added.

Added Wagner, "I realized that efforts to force us to compromise what we wanted for our private event in order to have access to public property was unconstitutional. Certainly people of other faiths are welcome to attend, but we want this to be a Christian event with Christian prayer as it has been for the previous ten years."

She continued, "We support the efforts of all groups to conduct their own events in front of City Hall. Initially, the interfaith representatives didn't want to do that; however, they later agreed and so did the council. Council passed a resolution on March 28 granting both the Christian and interfaith groups different times for their distinct NDP events. After remarking that this was acceptable, the interfaith group later withdrew their application and continued their attempts to persuade the Council to deny ours."

The Thomas More Law Center was asked to represent the Task Force after the Council's initial rejection of their application. Richard Thompson, the Law Center's Chief Counsel, addressed a special session of the council and explained it was unconstitutional for government to force a group to promote a message, in this case non-Christian prayers, it did not want. As a result, the Council unanimously voted to approve the application. However, a week later, under pressure from interfaith representatives, the Council rescinded its approval.

The following week, April 18, NDP Task Force members addressed the council and again a lawyer from the Law Center, Edward L. White III, was on hand to explain the constitutional right of Christians to hold their own prayer event in front of City Hall. This time the Council approved the application, 4 to 3. Thus, barring another change of heart by the city council, the Troy National Day of Prayer Christian Task Force will hold their event on May 5th at noon, at the Veteran's Plaza in front of Troy City Hall.

National days of prayer have been called as early as 1775 with the First Continental Congress. Abraham Lincoln called for such a day in 1863. In 1952 Congress established a National Day of Prayer by joint resolution, which was signed into law by President Truman and later amended by President Regan.

The Troy National Day of Prayer Christian Task Force is a local arm of the national group, National Day of Prayer Task Force, headed by Shirley Dobson, wife of nationally renowned founder and chairman of Focus on the Family, Jim Dobson.

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