

Ohio City Grants Free Speech for Independence Day

An Akron, Ohio, man was restored his civil liberties just in time for Independence Day. City officials reversed course and allowed Christian man Jason Robinson to peacefully share his faith near this year's Fourth of July fireworks show at a public park.

The decision came after the Alliance Defense Fund, a legal alliance of Christian attorneys and like-minded organizations defending the right of people to freely live out their faith, sent the mayor a letter on Robinson's behalf. The letter urged the city not to violate Robinson's constitutional rights at the annual downtown fireworks display.

"Mr. Robinson desires to convey his religious beliefs through activities protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution," the letter states. "Religious expression is speech and is entitled to the same level of protection as other kinds of speech."

Robinson and his family began sharing their faith near the Akron fireworks show on July 4, 2010, by displaying a sign with an image of Jesus and the words "There is hope," and handing out traditional gospel message tracts.

Although the family was peacefully expressing their beliefs on public sidewalks, police prohibited them from doing so and threatened Robinson with arrest if he did not stop. Out of fear of being arrested, Robinson ceased activities.

"Christians shouldn't be silenced and threatened with arrest for attempting to express their beliefs at a free public event on public property," says Jonathan Scruggs, ADF litigation staff counsel. "The city did the right thing by directing police officers to stop restricting such constitutionally

protected expression. It was especially fitting on a day when our nation celebrates its freedom.”

About a week after ADF attorneys sent the letter to Mayor Donald L. Plusquellic, he issued a directive on June 29 to police officers, stating that they cannot restrict such expressive activities on streets or sidewalks around the area. Robinson and his family were able to share their faith at this year’s Akron Independence Day fireworks display without incident.