

Ohio City Grants Free Speech for Independence Day



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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.