

35,000 Urge Bloomberg to Lift 9/11 Prayer Ban

The American Center for Law and Justice has heard from more than 35,000 Americans who are urging New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg to reverse his decision banning prayer and religious leaders from participating in the 10th anniversary remembrance at Ground Zero.

“The decision by the mayor to prohibit prayer at this most solemn occasion is offensive to millions of Americans and inconsistent with the nation’s long and cherished history of prayer,” says Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the ACLJ. “Not only is prayer appropriate for this ceremony, it is indeed necessary to adequately commemorate the tragic events of a decade ago.

“For many, 9/11 is not a distant memory. It’s still very real. Many face day-to-day struggles to cope with the loss of loved ones. Prayer brings many comfort and solace. Time and time again, the Supreme Court has recognized the importance of religion in our nation’s history and the appropriateness of prayer and other religious references in public” he argues. “We call on Mayor Bloomberg to reverse his decision and permit prayer and religious leaders to be a part of this sacred day.”

In a letter to Mayor Bloomberg, the ACLJ points out that invocations are the quintessential American form of solemnizing events. The ACLJ notes that Sept. 11, 2001, will be remembered in history not only as a horrible act of terrorism upon the United States, but also a time when Americans sacrificed their lives for others, a time when we stood together, unified and resilient.

The inclusion of prayer at the event, the ACLJ contends, is consistent with Supreme Court precedent. Justice Sandra Day

O'Connor summed up the appropriateness of prayer and invocation of divine assistance in remembering such an occasion as 9/11:

"For centuries, we have marked important occasions or pronouncements with references to God and invocations of divine assistance. Such references can serve to solemnize an occasion instead of to invoke divine provenance. The reasonable observer ... fully aware of our national history and the origins of such practices, would not perceive these acknowledgments as signifying a government endorsement of any specific religion, or even of religion over non-religion."

Further, the Supreme Court has recognized that the Establishment Clause does not require all religion to be purged from the public sphere. In fact, "[a] relentless and all-pervasive attempt to exclude religion from every aspect of public life could itself become inconsistent with the Constitution."

The entire letter to Mayor Bloomberg may be read [here](#).