

# Banned: Religious Expression Criminalized on Bourbon Street

Religious speech is a criminal offense on New Orleans' Bourbon Street. At least it will be if Mayor Mitch Landrieu has his way.

Last October, Landrieu approved a **religious speech** ban that prohibits loitering or congregating on Bourbon Street "for the purpose of disseminating any social, political or religious message between the hours of sunset and sunrise."

The provision bars any form of religious expression at night on Bourbon Street. Anyone convicted of violating this ban faces a fine and imprisonment for up to six months.

In May, police told a pastor from Vieux Carre **Assembly of God** Church that he could not continue discussing religion on Bourbon Street, even though he had been preaching there for the past 30 years every Tuesday and Friday evening. The pastor shared his faith and offered hope to those voluntarily willing to listen, without ever soliciting funds or harassing anyone.

Since the **religious speech ban** has been in effect, several people communicating a religious message have been arrested or threatened with arrest. Fearing arrest, the pastor has stopped going to Bourbon Street to discuss his faith. In the meantime, a variety of non-religious expression is allowed on the strip without consequence.

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) filed a lawsuit and a motion for preliminary injunction Thursday against the City of New Orleans for criminalizing **religious speech** on Bourbon Street.

"Religious speech is just as important, and just as protected

by the First Amendment, as speech about any other subject at any time of day. New Orleans cannot make criminals of people simply because they want to talk about their faith," says Joseph La Rue, ADF legal counsel.

"City Officials in New Orleans have chosen to criminalize speech about faith while allowing just about every other conceivable topic to be discussed and exposed. It's not up to the government to decide the topics we can and cannot discuss. The First Amendment protects an individual's freedom of speech. This law should be declared unconstitutional."