

Christian Wins Right to Share Jesus on Atlantic City Boardwalk

Christians like Pat Donlevy don't have to gamble their freedom when they talking about Jesus on Atlantic City's boardwalk anymore.

That's because Atlantic City will no longer enforce a city ordinance that police used to stop a man from engaging in religious speech on the city's boardwalk in June.

The Atlantic City Solicitor's Office has agreed the ordinance is "unenforceable in its present form" and that the city "intends to update" it. The change of heart comes after the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) sent a letter to the city in September.

ADF contacted the city after a police officer ordered Donlevy to stop talking to people on the boardwalk about his religious beliefs even though he wasn't creating congestion or harassing anyone. The officer told Donlevy that mere eye contact with anyone constituted harassment and that he would "have to write him up" if he continued his expression. Donlevy left out of fear of arrest.

Donlevy later contacted the Atlantic City Police Department to ask why he wasn't allowed to speak on the boardwalk. An officer cited a city ordinance that prohibits "religious services or other secular meetings of any kind" without a "written permit." The ordinance also states that "no person shall lecture or give addresses" without a permit.

"Christians shouldn't be punished for expressing their beliefs, so the city has done the right thing here in eliminating a law that allowed that to happen," says Jonathan

Scruggs, ADF litigation staff counsel. "Other cities should follow Atlantic City's lead in quickly agreeing to rectify unconstitutional restrictions on the free speech rights of their citizens. Atlantic City has demonstrated respect for those rights in this instance."