

Pre-Meal Prayer Back at the Table for PA Seniors

Senior citizens banned from **praying** before meals at a Pennsylvania senior center will once again be allowed to publicly petition the Lord.

For many years, senior citizens at the Downingtown Area Senior Center would start lunch by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by **prayer**. In April, the center reportedly announced that seniors are prohibited from offering a prayer at the beginning of lunch and may only engage in a “moment of silence” under its new policy.

“Silencing seniors who gather to pray before a meal when the Constitution doesn’t require it is dishonorable, so the senior center has done the honorable thing in rectifying the problem,” says Matt Sharp, Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) litigation staff counsel. “The private decision of senior citizens to pray before meals is private speech, and no law requires this privately owned senior center to restrict the religious expression of these members of America’s greatest generation.”

ADF sent its letter to a Pennsylvania senior center last week on behalf of Joan Scalia, a member at the center, urging the center to change its new policy prohibiting senior citizens from praying before meals. After receiving the letter, the center’s director contacted ADF and said the seniors would be allowed to pray.

The center apparently claimed the **prayer ban** was necessary because the meals are partially funded by the federal government and because one senior had found another person’s prayer offensive.

“Neither federal law nor the U.S. Constitution require the

center to silence the voluntary prayers of senior citizens prior to meals," the ADF letter stated. "The center is a private, nonprofit organization, and it is free to recognize and celebrate religion at the facility. The right thing to do out of respect for the senior citizens—many of whom fought or saw their spouses fight in wars to defend our nation and the freedoms upon which it is built—is to remove the ban on prayer before meals."