

South Carolina City Demands Permit for Public 'Jesus' Sign Display

A South Carolina man is challenging his city officials after being told he needed a permit to hold a sign that said "Trust Christ" and share his faith while on a public sidewalk.

First Liberty Institute, a non-profit legal group, sent a letter to the Town of Chapin, South Carolina on behalf of Ernest Giardino calling their requirement for a permit a violation of a local resident's First Amendment rights.

"Permit schemes, like the one found in Chapin, have the effect of freezing speech before it is uttered," reads the letter. "Permit schemes are thus viewed skeptically, being 'the most serious and least tolerable infringement on First Amendment rights.'"

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Early this summer, Giardino was on a public sidewalk at an intersection holding a 20x24 inch sign attached to a short handle, which read "Trust Christ He paid the price" on one side and "He Saved Others—Jesus—He'll Save You" on the other side.

According to First Liberty, Giardino had marched around town with similar signs for about eight months.

But on June 20, he was stopped by a Chapin police officer who told him he needed the city's permission to share his message with a sign.

The next day, the city officials confirmed Giardino would have to apply for a permit to continue sharing his faith.

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The permits would limit Giardino to holding his sign for only 30 minutes and he was advised that he would need to change sidewalk corners every 15 minutes while holding a sign, according to the law group.

“A demonstration permit really should not apply to someone holding up a sign saying ‘Trust Christ, he paid the price,’” First Liberty Senior Counsel Nate Kellum told The Post and Courier.

City spokesperson, Nicholle Burroughs, said permits have been required since 1980, although an amendment was made in 2021 to streamline the process for getting approval.

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