

I recently returned home to Humboldt after a few weeks away; as I rummaged through old newspapers I noticed there ~~was~~^{is} still a lawsuit pending against Police Chief Andrew Mills, that earned the front page ~~top~~^{top} of the Times-Standard. The suit has been filed against ~~some of our~~^{Mills & other} civic leaders, because they have been, gasp, praying. Chief Mills and mayor Frank Jager are defendants in a lawsuit alleging that they have violated the first amendment by things like praying at a Peace officers meeting, hosting a Prayer Breakfast, or endorsing prayer to open ~~meetings~~^{civic}. While at first glance this suit seems almost laughable, the stakes are high here, because it has to do with the separation of church and state, the free exercise of religion and freedom of speech.

~~This case alleges the defendants violated the separation of church and state.~~

~~Offer~~ Several comments on this important topic.

~~First~~, the separation of church and state is articulated ~~clearly~~^{clearly} in the first amendment to our constitution, which ~~states~~^{says} that congress shall make no law ~~endorsing~~^{establishing} religion nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof. I fully agree with the principle of keeping church and state separate. Why? It's good for the church, and state as well. When the church and state are in bed together, there tends to be a corrupting influence on both. But does a prayer before an officers' breakfast, or City Council meeting violate separation of church and state? In my view, Police Chief Mills was freely exercising his religious beliefs by praying and perhaps endorsing the prayers of others at a Peace officers Breakfast. The su-ers... ~~complain~~^{complain} that such prayers imply a specific endorsement of a particular religion, because the chief, mayor, etc are employees of our government, and ~~should thus~~^{keep prayers confined to their prayer-closet.}

If you are sympathetic to the plaintiff, it might sway your ~~opinion~~^{opinion} to know that Congress has endorsed a full time government paid chaplain ever since the meeting of the First Continental Congress. In fact, ~~our~~^{our} congress authorized paid chaplains three days before it finalized the wording of the first Amendment!

Furthermore, in May of this year, the US Supreme Court ruled on a lawsuit brought by some residents of Greece, New York complaining about the prayers held before town board meetings. ~~Now~~ I hasten to add that Greece, New York allows all sorts of religious people to pray before those meetings, including Wiccan priestesses. But the lawsuit seemed specifically directed against the prayers of certain pastors whose prayers were particularly Christian in both word and content. ~~The~~ Supreme Court voted 5-4 in favor of the town: meaning, they could continue to hold ~~prayers~~^{prayers}, even when those prayers were particular to the faith of the one praying and not generic; P.C., inoffensive prayers.

Bottom line: these local lawsuits are not likely to succeed any further than I can throw a grand piano. They are, however, creating a nuisance, WASTING THE time and energy ~~away~~ of both our courts and local leaders, who have a lot more important things to do than fight frivolous lawsuits.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment