

SCHEDULING POLICY FOR INVOCATIONS

AT THE CHESAPEAKE CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

Purpose

This policy is intended to provide guidance in scheduling invocations at City Council meetings and to encourage respect for the rich diversity of religious beliefs found in Chesapeake. Invocations are offered to invoke divine guidance upon the members of the Chesapeake City Council during their discussions, deliberations and decision-making.

Procedure

In December of each year the City Clerk or designee will send a letter to all religious leaders found in the City Clerk's Office database ~~list~~ inviting them to give an invocation at a Council meeting. The letter of invitation will include a schedule of meeting dates for the following year on which the religious leaders may request an available date. The database list shall include known ordained religious leaders of monotheistic religions, preferably with an established congregation in the City of Chesapeake.

By the end of January, all of the responses from religious leaders will be reviewed and the City Clerk or designee will prepare a schedule of religious leaders who will provide the invocation at each Council meeting. Religious leaders will be selected on a "first-come, first-serve basis." The City Clerk or designee will send a confirmation letter to each religious leader scheduled for a Council meeting.

Should there be religious leaders who respond to the invitation and cannot be placed on the schedule, the City Clerk or designee will send thank you letters to them for their willingness to provide the invocation and place their names on a "standby" list to be contacted in the event a special meeting is scheduled by City Council, or there is a cancellation by a previously confirmed religious leader.

The scheduled religious leader will be contacted the day before the meeting with a reminder that they are scheduled to give the invocation.

If a religious leader should have to cancel their attendance, the City Clerk or designee will contact another religious leader on the "standby" list to offer that date as available for the invocation. If another religious leader cannot be confirmed from the "standby" list, the City Clerk or designee will arrange for a member of City Council to provide the invocation.

Guidelines

Based on Constitutional interpretations rendered by the United States Supreme Court and the Fourth Circuit of the United States Court of Appeals, the invocation should be non-sectarian with elements of the American civil religion and should offer the members of City Council a time of reflection and encouragement. The prayer should not be used to proselytize or advance any one faith or belief, nor should it be used to disparage any other faith or belief.

The letters of invitation and confirmation, samples of which are attached, should remind religious leaders to refrain from making references that are specific to any particular religion, denomination or sect or that promote particular religious figures, deities, images or symbols. The invocation should be seen as an opportunity to convey a common message of shared values and ideals derived from our American heritage.

Contact Information

Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Clerk of the City Council, Dolores A. Moore, at 382-6151.