

**WHEN YOU ARE
ASKED TO GIVE
PUBLIC PRAYER**

**IN A DIVERSE
SOCIETY**



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The National Conference
for Community and Justice

Guidelines for Civic Occasions

PUBLIC PRAYER IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY

Guidelines for Civic Occasions

Faith leaders and others are sometimes called upon to present prayer at civic occasions including club meetings, legislative sessions, graduations, political rallies, testimonial dinners and community forums. Prayer in such secular settings can and should bind a group together in a common concern. However, it can become unintentionally divisive, when forms or language exclude persons from faith traditions different than that of the speaker.

Individuals who lead the general community in prayer have the responsibility to be clear about the public nature of the occasion and respectful of the composition of the audience. Prayer on behalf of the entire community should be easily shared by listeners from different faiths and traditions.

Inclusive Public Prayer is nonsectarian, general and carefully planned to avoid embarrassments and misunderstandings. On civic occasions, it is authentic prayer that also enables people to recognize the pluralism of American society.

When asking a person to offer a prayer on a civic occasion, it is important to explain clearly the need for general and inclusive prayer. Some persons are reluctant to offer Inclusive Public Prayer. This position should be respected, and the individual should be given the option of gracefully declining the invitation.

INCLUSIVE PUBLIC PRAYER

- seeks the highest common denominator without compromise of conscience
- calls upon God on behalf of the particular public gathered; avoids individual petitions
- uses forms and vocabulary that allow persons of different faiths to give assent to what is said

Sensitivity to the public's diversity and a commitment to inclusiveness should also apply to the content of meditations or addresses on civic occasions and to the selection and performance of music.

- uses universal, inclusive terms for deity rather than particular proper names for divine manifestations. Some opening invocations are "Almighty God", "Our Maker" "Source of All Being", "Creator God" or "Creator and Sustainer." Possible closing words are "Hear Our Prayer," "May Goodness Flourish," or, simply "Amen."
- uses the language most widely understood by the audience, unless one purpose of the event is to express ethnic/cultural diversity, in which case multiple languages can be effective.
- considers other creative alternatives, such as a moment of silence
- remains faithful to the purposes of acknowledging the divine presence, giving thanks and seeking blessing, and is not used as an opportunity to preach argue or testify.

*Inclusive public prayer in a
pluralistic society must be sensitive
to a diversity of faiths.*

*Leading such prayer is both
a privilege and a responsibility.*



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The National Conference
for Community and Justice
of Connecticut and Western
Massachusetts, Inc.

What is NCCJ?

The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), founded in 1927 as the National Conference of Christians and Jews, is a human relations organization dedicated to fighting bias, bigotry and racism in America. NCCJ promotes understanding and respect among all races, religions and cultures through advocacy, conflict resolution and education.

NCCJ promotes quality inter-group relations by empowering individuals and leaders to create institutional changes that will transform communities to provide fuller opportunity for all.

NCCJ seeks to build just and inclusive communities in which people from different religious, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds learn to live together with mutual respect and without compromising their faiths and identities. NCCJ opens minds and opens hearts!

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR COMMUNITY & JUSTICE
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