

A GUIDE FOR LEADING PRAYER IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY



A GUIDE FOR INCLUSIVE PRAYER

The Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice has developed the following recommendations for our friends of every faith when called upon to lead prayer or worship in public.

Leading prayer in a public setting is both an opportunity and an honored responsibility. We live in a society made up of many cultures, views, religions, and beliefs.

It is a defining part of the greatness of our nation that we have adopted the motto “E Pluribus Unum” meaning “Out of Many, One”! Accepting the task of leading a prayer outside the boundary of a particular faith community places a special responsibility on the one who leads the prayer.

On civic occasions, authentic prayer should enable people to recognize the pluralism of American society. In some settings, authentic prayer may include a succession of representatives of the resident faith communities.

Inclusive public prayer in a pluralistic society must be sensitive to a diversity of faiths/non-faith perspectives.

In such settings, the sponsoring organization may want to hear a diversity of tradition-rooted prayers, given over time by leaders of many religious communities.



In other settings, the sponsoring organization's rules or the nature of the gathering may call for inclusive public prayer that is non-sectarian and carefully planned to avoid embarrassments and misunderstandings.

Sensitivity to the public's diversity and a commitment to inclusion should also apply to the content of meditation and addresses on civic occasions, and to the selection and performance of music.

Leading such prayer is both a privilege and responsibility.

In a pluralistic public setting, it is the prayer leader's responsibility to be respectful of and caring for the values and feelings of our fellow Oklahomans as we engage in any public behavior, especially to religious minorities who may often feel marginalized by the dominant religious communities.

For Organizations

- Consider creating guidelines, expectations, and rules regarding leading prayer in a public setting.
- Creative alternatives, such as a moment of silence or a reflection on the meaning of the gathering, may be acceptable.
- Recognize that not all religious leaders would feel comfortable engaging in community prayer or public worship using non-sectarian vocabulary and gestures. These friends in our community should be respected for their viewpoint and for their decision to decline invitations to lead prayer in a public, diverse setting.

For Individuals

- Public worship and prayer are intended to manifest and deepen our connections to one another, and thus should always be inclusive in nature.



For Individuals (Cont.)

- Be clear about the nature of the occasion and respect the composition of the audience. Ask the organization sponsoring the event or occasion about their guidelines, expectations, and rules.
- in order to ensure one can fulfill ones task within their parameters.
- Use non-sectarian language and be respectful of the public's widely-held belief in a Creator, while avoiding language or images that are connected
- to any one tradition or practice of a particular faith or religion.
- The act should remain faithful to the purpose of acknowledging divine presence, giving thanks and seeking blessing, and is not used as an opportunity to preach, argue or testify.
- Some religious traditions and individuals do not affirm the concept of God as understood in theistic traditions. Consider using language that refers to deeply held values without referring to a divine being per se.

The Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice, founded in 1928 as a local chapter of the National Conference of Christian and Jews, is a human relations organization dedicated to achieving respect and understanding for all.

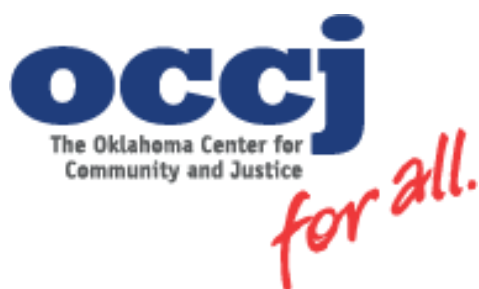
OCCJ empowers individuals and leaders to create institutional changes that will transform communities to provide fuller opportunities for all. OCCJ seeks to build just and inclusive communities in which people from different religious, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds live together with mutual respect and without compromising their faiths and identities.

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