

SURPRISE CITY COUNCIL INVOCATION POLICY CITY OF SURPRISE

WHEREAS, the City Council is an elected legislative and deliberative public body, serving the citizens of the City of Surprise (“City”);

WHEREAS, legislative bodies in America have long maintained a tradition of solemnizing proceedings by allowing for an invocation or opening prayer before each meeting;

WHEREAS, since incorporation, the City Council has, from time to time, and until some point in 2007, maintained a practice of invocations at the opening of City Council meetings;

WHEREAS, the City Council desires to re-implement a practice of opening Regular Council Meetings with prayer or invocations and adopt this formal, written policy to clarify and codify the invocation practice to ensure inclusion of all individuals or groups, regardless of particular faith, belief, doctrine, dogma, or lack thereof; to participate, or refrain from participation, as their own conscience dictates; and

WHEREAS, the City Council recognizes its constitutional duty to interpret, construe, and amend this policy to comply with constitutional requirements as they are announced.

NOW, THEREFORE, the following shall be known as the “Surprise City Council Invocation Policy” and shall control the process and procedures pertaining to opening invocations before Regular Meetings of the City Council.

1. This policy is not intended, and shall not be implemented or construed in anyway to affiliate the City Council with, nor express the Council’s endorsement or preference for, any faith or religious denominations. Rather, this policy is intended to acknowledge and express the City Council’s respect for the diversity of both organized and unorganized religious denominations, as well as other faiths, belief systems, or the lack thereof, represented and practiced among the citizens of the City of Surprise.

2. In order to solemnize proceedings of the City Council, it is the policy of the City Council to allow for an invocation or prayer, not to exceed one minutes in length, to be offered to open its meetings for the benefit of the City Council and the community.

3. The invocation shall not be listed or recognized as an agenda item for the meeting so that it may be clear the invocation is not considered a part of the public business. However, the agenda will notice the following:

Any prayer or invocation that may be offered before the start of the Regular Council Meeting is a voluntary offering by a private resident of Surprise; has not been previously reviewed or approved by City Council or City staff; should not be considered an endorsement of any particular religion by the City or its officials, as the beliefs, viewpoint, and content are personal to the speaker; and no participation by any person in attendance is required. A list of volunteers is maintained by the office of the City Clerk and interested persons should contact the Clerk’s Office for further information.

4. Immediately after the opening gavel that officially begins the meeting and the agenda/business of the public, the Mayor shall introduce the invocational speaker.

5. No member of the City Council, City employee, or any other person in attendance at a meeting shall be required to participate in any invocation or prayer that is offered.

6. Neither the City Council, City Clerk, nor City staff shall engage in any prior inquiry, review of, restriction, or involvement in, the content of any prayer or invocation to be offered.

7. In the event the scheduled invocational speaker fails to appear or there is no scheduled speaker, the City Council shall observe a moment of silence.

8. To maintain a spirit of respect and ecumenism, the invocation shall not be exploited as an opportunity to proselytize nor disparage any faith or belief, or lack thereof, different than that of the invocational speaker.

9. Any invocational speaker who violates this policy shall be subject to disqualification from offering future invocations.

10. To ensure that invocational speakers are selected without preference to any specific religion, belief, faith, or ideology, from amongst a diverse pool of the Surprise citizens, volunteers shall be selected according to the following procedure:

a. The invocation shall be voluntarily delivered, without compensation, by any person who is a resident of Surprise and on the list of volunteers, which shall be maintained by the City Clerk's Office. The City Clerk shall include any resident on the list upon submission of written request including the person's local address and contact information, including e-mail.

b. Within thirty (30) days of the adoption of this policy, and on or about July 1 of each calendar year thereafter, the City Clerk shall e-mail one invitation addressed to the volunteer group which shall include each person on the list of volunteers as follows:

The City Council makes it a policy to invite residents of the City of Surprise to voluntarily offer an invocation or prayer not to exceed one minutes in length before the beginning of its meetings.

If you are willing to assist the City Council in this regard, please send a reply at your earliest convenience to the City Clerk. Volunteer invocational speakers are scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis. The dates of the City Council's regularly scheduled meetings for the upcoming fiscal year are listed on the following, attached page. If you have a preference among the dates, please state that request in your written reply.

This opportunity is voluntary, and you are free to offer the invocation according to the dictates of your own conscience. To maintain a spirit of respect and ecumenism, the City Council requests only that the opportunity not be exploited as an effort to proselytize, i.e., convert others to the particular faith of the speaker, nor to disparage any faith or

belief different than that of the speaker.

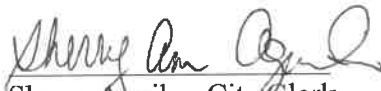
On behalf of the City Council, I thank you in advance for considering this invitation.

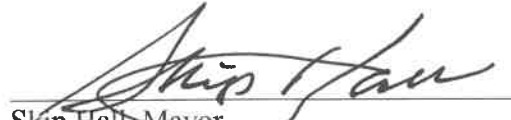
c. Respondents to the invitation shall be scheduled by the City Clerk on a first-come, first-serve basis. The City Clerk shall schedule and notify the volunteer, by e-mail, of the date and time the speaker should be prepared to offer the invocation or prayer. The notice shall remind the speaker of the duty not to proselytize nor disparage others' religions, faiths, beliefs, or lack thereof, and of the three minute time limitation.

d. No invitational speaker shall be scheduled to offer an invocation at consecutive meetings, or at more than three Council Meetings in any calendar year.

ADOPTED THIS 18th DAY OF June, 2019.

Attest:


Sherry Aguilar, City Clerk


Skip Hall, Mayor