

MINUTES

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF HENDERSON**

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MAY 25, 2010**

The Henderson County Board of Commissioners met for a special called meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Bo Thomas Auditorium of Blue Ridge Community College.

Those present were: Chairman Bill Moyer, Vice-Chairman Mark Williams, Commissioner Larry Young, Commissioner Charlie Messer, Commissioner Chuck McGrady, County Manager Steve Wyatt, Assistant County Manager Selena Coffey, County Attorney Russ Burrell and Clerk to the Board Teresa L. Wilson.

Also present were: Associate County Attorney Sarah Zambon and PIO Christy DeStefano.

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

Chairman Moyer called the meeting to order and stated the purpose of the special called meeting is a Public Hearing in regards to prayer. Chairman Moyer asked each person who had signed up to speak please limit their comments to about 3 minutes.

1. Marcia Elliott was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name and read part of the constitution.
2. Samuel Elliott spoke in favor of prayer and recommended prayer by the Henderson County Ministerial Association with various denominations.
3. Larry Marshall was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name and referred to an Aaron Tippin song "You've got to stand for something."
4. Jerry Warren was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name and felt this was the only thing being questioned at the meeting and Christians should not be asked to pray excluding the God they believe in. Everyone should be allowed to pray as to their beliefs.
5. Terry Maybin was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name as it does not deny others with different beliefs to prayer in accordance to their beliefs. Ms. Maybin provided a petition including 1163 signatures showing their support to the Henderson County Commissioners for opening their meetings by praying in "Jesus" name.
6. Rabbi Phillip Bentley was against sectarian prayer in government functions and meetings. "When prayer is on an official agenda for a government meeting that firm must include everybody."
7. Charles McConnell was in favor of prayer and respected the right of any religion to have a representative at a public meeting to pray in their own customary way.
8. Dr. Sheldon Marne was against prayer in meetings and felt it was against the Commission's oath of office.
9. Fred Dorsey was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name as we must protect the rights that have been fought for in our country.
10. Martha Sachs was against prayer in meetings with so many religion beliefs to convene any public body to one specific entity of the deity. Sachs suggested that a simple moment of silence would be the best option for the county commissioners.
11. Phillip Allen is president of the WNC Chapter of American United for separation of church and state. He stated "the application of first state separation in cases like this one is not meant to foster hostility in order to win them, just the opposite."
12. Theron Maybin was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name. Prayer before a meeting is a tradition that has gone on for hundreds of years where the commissioners ask for guidance. The bickering and fighting amongst each other is not necessary.
13. Michele Skeele was against prayer to one entity and felt a moment of silence would be more appropriate. She attends many meetings and feels uncomfortable during prayer in "Jesus" name as she felt she had no place or representation.

DATE APPROVED: June 7, 2010

14. Rev. Bryan Melton was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name. He provided a quote from the Mayflower Compact “In the name of God, having undertaken, for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith did solemnly and mutually in the presence of God covenant and bind ourselves together.”
15. David Robinson was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name based on the authority of the Bible. “Jesus is the way, the truth, and the light and no one can get to God except through him. By virtually omitting his name through prayer we throw ourselves in a position of publicly denying him.”
16. Dr. Barbara Barnett stated there are many ways of faith and with respect for the religions practices in Henderson County, the Establishment of Religion Clause of the First Amendment she feels means: Neither a state nor the federal government can set up a church.
17. Phyllis Dean was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name. She stated when atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hare accomplished having prayer removed from schools violence increased.
18. Richard Merck felt the use of prayer in “Jesus” name needs to continue at the beginning of meetings. This is not forcing Jesus Christ on anyone.
19. Tony Hall was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name and stated regardless of the outcome of the meeting, what we all think, what we all may say, or how we talk about a generic prayer, this is all recorded in Heaven.
20. Sam Gibbs was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name. We all are citizens and have our rights and opinions and we should respect each other. He stated that Jesus was recorded praying thirty-eight times in the bible. Thirty-two of those times were in public corporate segments.
21. Doug Coggins was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name but not in favor of generic prayer. If it is generic he feels it is not prayer. Prayer is close and sacred.
22. Charlotte Wolf was against prayer in meetings. She could ignore a prayer beseeching Jesus and the principal of that act does upset her. However, Ms. Wolf feels this assumes too much.
23. Connie Lucas was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name. This country was founded on Christianity and America has lost its foundation; no praying in schools, and discussion of possible removal of “In God we Trust” from coins.
24. Anthony Craver was in favor of payer in “Jesus” name and has seen hundreds of lives changed by the power of the name of Jesus Christ. Prayer in “Jesus” name is not to offend or exclude anyone or to say that his faith is greater than anyone else’s faith. He has prayed at several meetings and would not be offended by other leaders of the faith community praying.
25. Pastor Ken Mason was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name. Precedence is an important part of our citizen’s government. The first precedence was established in Genesis 1:1; “In the beginning God” and he feels this says enough. Prayer without saying Jesus name is prayer that will not be heard.
26. Esther Cleveland stated that Protestants were persecuted for their belief in the bible. We must be very careful about our religious freedoms.
27. Nancy Glowacki felt every religion has a similar golden rule to be kind to one another and felt it was not a difficult question since we have separation of church and state. It is not a competition, but an opportunity. Nothing is lost by coming to the table with different philosophies. Dialogue can be the bridge.
28. Roger Smith was against prayer in meetings to one entity and questioned if the governmental body should endorse a particular religion over others.
29. Jean Dalton was in favor of prayer as our forefathers set the precedence to pray many years ago. It is a shame that the question of whether or not we can prayer must to be answered today.
30. Gene Mathis was in favor of prayer as he had served his country in the military through the principals of the Lord Jesus Christ.
31. Teresa Capps was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name. She felt the only objection was saying prayer in Jesus name.
32. Ben Maultsby was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name. Prayer has already been taken out of schools and look at how it has affected the schools today.
33. Tammy Summey was in favor of prayer in “Jesus” name and felt her faith was being persecuted. She has no objection to anyone else praying in their belief.

34. Beverly Green was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name. This does affect our children, our lives, and it does have consequences. She believes in the Constitution which says she has freedom of speech. Please keep prayer in our government.
35. Mike Bennette was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name. He felt other should be allowed to pray also.
36. Rudolph Heatherly was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name and thanked the Board for praying before their meetings.
37. Wade Pittillo was in favor of prayer in "Jesus" name. We need to get back to what our country was founded on. The majority of people here want prayer to continue.

Chairman Moyer commended the public for their courtesy and respect during the public input time. This is a very difficult subject with strong opinions and has been a continuing issue. The rotation system has been tried from time to time but only works for a short time.

It was the consensus of the Board that action should be taken no later than the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Commissioner Young stated that he personally prays everyday that the Lord Jesus Christ will give him the ability to do what is right for the people of Henderson County. He is ready to vote.

Commissioner Williams felt the Board had failed when it came to the terms of the prayers offered. Since he came on Board there have been a very limited number of folks to come forward requesting the opportunity to prayer before a meeting. It has only become an issue in recent months as media picked up on the action taken in Forsyth County. He has been called on many times to prayer and when he prays it will be in Jesus name. He does this not to grandstand, not to cause offense of others of different faith, but because this is his faith. To do anything otherwise would be going against his personal beliefs and he doesn't believe the people of Henderson County elected him to go against his own personal preferences. Mr. Williams feels that it is his responsibility when he offers prayer to offer it in Jesus name. It is also a responsibility to love thy neighbor and he respects the beliefs of others and their views. We do live in an area that is predominately Christian so anyone moving into the area, move assured with some understanding; the majorities of our prayers during a public meeting are very likely to be of that denomination and belief, and will likely continue to be so. Often times we make a concession for those in minority and he feels there are times when it is appropriate to do that. The people who are enduring this are running the risk of having their rights taken away. It becomes wrong to be part of the majority and we see that taking place and have for years. Congress prays before session and in the last year approximately 1/3 of those prayers ended in Jesus name or some variation of it. So to say that it is unconstitutional and yet our Congress is allowed to liberties of ending pray in the name of Jesus Christ, there are some inconsistencies there.

Commissioner Williams made the motion that the Board of Commissioners continue their present practice of praying before meetings, either by a board member, county staff, or leader from the faith community and allow the individual offering the prayer the freedom to pray in accordance with his or her faith, including "in the name of Jesus Christ", but not excluding expression of other faiths.

After further discussion Chairman Moyer reminded the Board of the motion on the table. *All voted in favor and the motion carried.*

ADJOURN

Commissioner Young made the motion that the Board adjourn at 9:20 p.m. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

Attest:

Teresa L. Wilson, Clerk to the Board

William L. Moyer, Chairman