

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 › MADISON, WI 53701 › (608) 256-8900 › WWW.FFRF.ORG

February 19, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: dgilbert@cityofmarion.in.gov

David Gilbert
Chief of Police
Marion Police Department
301 S. Branson St., #196
Marion, IN 46952

Re: Unconstitutional religious display

Dear Chief Gilbert:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation at the Marion Police Department. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 41,000 members across the country, including 600 members in Indiana. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned community member informs us that the Marion Police Department displays a bible verse on its property, advertised by the Department's social media as "the message our officers see every time they depart headquarters." The verse reads: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. -Matthew 5:9."

The person who contacted us reports how alarming and exclusionary it is to see this message being displayed by a public police department:

Seeing this religious message displayed so prominently at a government-run police department made me feel alienated and uneasy. It sent a clear signal that Christianity is being treated as the "default" or preferred belief system within an institution that is supposed to serve and protect everyone, regardless of religion or lack thereof. As a non-Christian, it's disheartening and even a little intimidating to see faith used to frame law enforcement duties — it feels like there's a spiritual qualification being placed on public service. I want to trust that my local police operate from a position of neutrality and inclusivity, not under the influence of a particular religion. This kind of messaging undermines that trust and makes me question whether officers see themselves as enforcers of the law or as agents of a religious mission.

Use of religious imagery by important government offices unnecessarily excludes nonbelievers and undermines confidence in the neutrality of the police department. We ask that the Department remove the religious iconography from its property.

The Supreme Court has long recognized that the First Amendment “mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cnty. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). Posting a bible quote on government property fails to respect this constitutional mandate of neutrality. This quote from the New Testament is explicitly a Christian quote, and only a Christian quote. This posting promotes religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths.

Referencing the bible on government property sends the message to minority religious and nonreligious residents and Department employees “that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309–10 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)). This is unnecessarily divisive.

People interact with and rely on law enforcement officers during some of the most urgent and vulnerable times of their lives. These people should not be made to feel alienated, like political outsiders, because their local government they support with their taxes oversteps its power by declaring that its officers are representatives of the Christian god. Nor should the Department privilege religious citizens. Such a show of religious preference undermines the credibility of the police department and calls into question the impartiality of their law enforcement officials.

We hope you agree that law enforcement must be even-handed and avoid any appearance of bias toward some citizens, and hostility toward others. Citizens of Marion trust their law enforcement officials to attend to their secular duties. Spending taxpayer time and money placing religious messages on police department property is beyond the scope of secular government.

The religious posting on Marion Police Department property must be removed. Please inform us in writing of the steps the Department takes to address this constitutional violation in order to respect the right of conscience of all Marion residents. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Madeline Ziegler".

Madeline Ziegler
Staff Attorney

Enclosure



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Marion Police (Indiana) updated their cover photo.



Jul 12 · 🌐

The message our officers see every time they depart headquarters to serve. We appreciate the support of our citizens and FB friends-- thank you!

