

Clark County Invocation Guidelines

Foundational guidance

1. Invocations may be offered as a pre-agenda item before regular public meetings of the Board of County Councilors (board). They are not considered part of the public's business.
2. Clergy recognized by a religious organization may volunteer to offer an invocation on invitation of the board. The person delivering the invocation shall herein be referred to as a cleric.
3. Invocations shall be given by a single cleric and may not exceed two minutes.
4. Invited clerics must be scheduled by board staff. Clerics wanting to give an invocation are encouraged to contact the board's office at (360) 397-2232 or www.clark.wa.gov/bocc/index.html.
5. A cleric's faith shall not preclude his/her ability to give an invocation.
6. The board serves constituents of all faiths, expresses no faith preference, and recognizes no faith as superior or inferior to others. Therefore:
 - a. The cleric's invocation shall seek wisdom and guidance from a higher authority as the board engages in critical issues that affect Clark County residents.
 - b. Clerics giving invocations shall be sensitive to the diversity of faiths in our country so that their invocations reflect courtesy and respect to all.
 - c. Invocations are intended to provide positive, uplifting messages of wisdom and guidance; invocations are not an opportunity to disparage other people, organizations or beliefs or divide communities in Clark County.
 - d. Those giving an invocation will do so with the solemnity, veneration and respect with which they lead prayers or entreaties in their own congregation.
 - e. No invocation shall be used to lobby, proselytize or advance a particular faith, and no invocation shall request funding or support for a faith or faith-based activity.
7. The chair of the board will introduce a cleric by name and title prior to an invocation.
8. Some board meetings will not have a cleric scheduled to give an invocation. In such cases, the chair, at his/her discretion, may ask for a moment of silence.
9. No member of the board, public or government at a board meeting shall be required or expected to participate in an invocation.
10. No remuneration or other compensation shall be provided for giving an invocation.

Process Guidance

1. Staff will compile an invitation list (list) of religious organizations in Clark County. The initial list will be developed through governmental data about registration of nonprofit religious organizations, but also telephone directories, Internet searches or other outreach.
2. Any religious organization not included on the list may request in writing to be added. Such a request shall be mailed to the Clerk to the Board, Board of County Councilors, PO Box 5000, Vancouver, WA 98666-5000. It must provide the following information:
 - a. Name of the religious organization
 - b. Street address of the religious organization
 - c. Name and title of the cleric who will give the invocation.
 - d. Answers to these four questions:

- Are Clark County residents members of or adherents to this religious organization?
 - Is this organization currently a 501(c)3 religious organization in good standing? If yes, provide the federal religious nonprofit employer identification number (EIN).
 - Do members or adherents of this religious organization engage in prayer or entreaty to a higher authority as a central feature of their religion?
 - Does this religious organization have an established procedure for ordaining clergy or related representatives who lead religious services?
3. Organizations will be added to the list only if Clark County residents are members or adherents.
 4. Organizations with a current federal religious nonprofit EIN may be added to the list.
 5. Organizations without a current federal religious nonprofit EIN may be added to the list if they are shown to (1) engage in prayer or entreaty to a higher authority as a central feature of their religion and (2) have an established procedure for ordaining clergy or related representatives to lead religious services.
 6. The list shall be a public document and published on the board's section of the Clark County website. That page shall include the most current version of these guidelines and contact information for religious organizations seeking to be added to the list.
 7. Before the end of each calendar year, Clark County staff shall send a letter of invitation to religious organizations on the list inviting clerics to give an invocation. Clerics must provide the Clerk to the Board an affirmative, written response to be put on the invocation schedule for the coming year.
 8. Scheduling clerics shall be on a first-come, first-served or other random basis.
 9. Scheduling clerics shall ensure invocation opportunities for the widest feasible variety of faiths. Staff shall track invocations by religious category to avoid the appearance of religious preference in frequency of scheduling and with the goal that no religious category would represent more than 40 percent of invocations in a calendar year.
 10. No cleric shall provide invocations preceding consecutive board meetings.
 11. No cleric shall provide invocations more than twice in a calendar year.
 12. No cleric shall be scheduled to provide an invocation a second time before all other clerics on the list have an opportunity to offer an invocation at least once in a calendar year.

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