

**REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**  
**HENDERSON COUNTY**  
**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**MEETING DATE:** 12 May 2014  
**SUBJECT:** Meeting Invocation Policy  
**PRESENTER:** Charles Russell Burrell  
**ATTACHMENT(S):** Draft Policy

**SUMMARY OF REQUEST:**

With the announcement of the United States Supreme Court decision in *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, the previous prohibition (at least within the area encompassed by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals) on meeting invocations is no longer in effect.

Attached is a proposed resolution in essence re-commencing the Board's Invocation Policy which was in effect prior to the Fourth Circuit's Decisions.

County staff will present further information on this matter.

**BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:**

Consideration of the draft resolution.

If the Board is so inclined, the following motion is suggested:

***I move that the Board adopt the Resolution regarding  
Invocations at meetings of the Board of Commissioners.***

**Before the  
Board of Commissioners  
Of Henderson County**

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**A RESOLUTION REGARDING  
INVOCATIONS AT MEETINGS  
OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

**Adopted 12 May 2014**

1           **WHEREAS**, Henderson County, the State of North Carolina, and the United States of America all have a  
2 rich religious heritage deserving of celebration and observance; and,

3           **WHEREAS**, opening meetings of the Board of Commissioners and other legislative bodies with an  
4 invocation seeking guidance from the Divine has become over the United States' history a part of the fabric of our  
5 society in Henderson County and elsewhere, and generally has a salutary effect on such meetings and its participants;  
6 and,

7           **WHEREAS**, the United States Supreme Court has determined recognition “that, since this nation was  
8 founded and until the present day, many Americans deem that their own existence must be understood by precepts  
9 far beyond the authority of government”; and,

10           **WHEREAS**, the purpose of such invocations has not been, is not and should not be to proselytize or  
11 advance or any one faith or belief, nor to disparage any faith or belief, but rather to focus the participants of meetings  
12 of the Board of Commissioners on their greater purposes, and to invoke guidance from a source other than the  
13 immediate concerns at hand; and,

14           **WHEREAS**, the United States Supreme Court, in *Town of Gree v. Galloway*, has given indication that such  
15 invocations are permitted and proper, in circumstances where an elected body invites religious leaders from its area  
16 to provide invocations without any preference to their denomination, in a manner “designed to foster widespread



1 participation throughout the community” while solemnizing the occasion of the meeting, “expressing confidence in  
2 the future, and encouraging the recognition of what is worthy of appreciation in society”; and,

3 **WHEREAS**, the Board of Commissioners does not desire to require participation by those who attend its  
4 meetings in its invocation should such those in attendance not wish to participate, does not desire to inhibit the  
5 expression of any of the diverse religious views held by congregants within Henderson County.

6 **NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS RESOLVED** as follows:

7 A. At or immediately prior to the call to order for the conduct of public business of regular meetings  
8 of the Board of Commissioners, there shall be held an invocation, followed by the pledge of allegiance to the United  
9 States of America, inviting only those in attendance who wish to do so to participate.

10 B. The invocation shall be led by leaders of religious congregations worshipping in Henderson County,  
11 according to their beliefs, within the parameters set out in this paragraph. Such congregational leaders shall be  
12 invited by the Board to provide such invocations for Board meetings as stated below, in order to celebrate the rich  
13 and diverse religious heritage of Henderson County. The only guidance provided to such congregational leaders in  
14 their invocation shall be:

15 (1) Invocations should be intended to focus the participants of such meetings on their greater  
16 purposes, and invoke guidance from a source other than the immediate concerns at hand; and

17 (2) Invocations should be relatively brief, and should not be directed to any particular issue  
18 pending before the Board; and

19 (3) Invocations must not be intended to advance or any one faith or belief, or to disparage any  
20 other faith or belief.



1 C. No one attending such meeting, whether member Board, county employee, or any other person,  
2 shall be required to participate in any prayer that is offered, or to recite the pledge of allegiance.

3 D. Annually after the establishment of the regular meeting schedule for this Board, the Clerk to the  
4 Board shall send an annual invitation letter to the congregations worshipping within Henderson County. Such  
5 invitation shall include a copy of this Resolution. The listing of such congregations shall be obtained from sources  
6 reasonably available to the Clerk, including telephone listings, and shall also include Henderson County congregations  
7 which have informed the Clerk of their desire to participate. The invitation will request that the congregational  
8 leader contact the Clerk to schedule their participation. Participation shall be on a “first to respond, first to be  
9 scheduled” basis, and shall be scheduled by the Clerk in such a manner.

10 E. The list of congregations to whom the invitation letter is sent, and the list of scheduled invocations  
11 kept by the Clerk, shall be available for public inspection.

12 F. Should a person scheduled to provide an invocation not be present at the scheduled time and place  
13 for the same, or should no person be scheduled for a particular meeting, a member of the Board or other person  
14 designated by the Board may provide such invocation on the same terms as stated above.

15 G. This resolution is effective upon adoption.

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Made by adopted motion of the commission, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2014.

HENDERSON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
CHARLES D. MESSER, Chairman

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
THOMAS H. THOMPSON, Vice Chairman

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
LARRY YOUNG, Member

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
J. MICHAEL EDNEY, Member

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
GRADY HAWKINS, Member

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk to the Board

