

Invocation Policy

It is the intent of the Board to allow a private citizen to solemnize the proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the Charter Township of White Lake, Michigan. It is the policy of the Board to allow for an invocation, which may include a prayer, a reflective moment of silence, or a short solemnizing message, to be offered before its meetings for the benefit of the Board.

1. No member or employee of the Board or any other person in attendance at the meeting shall be required to participate in any prayer that is offered.
2. The invocation shall be voluntarily delivered by an eligible member of the clergy in the Township. To ensure that such person (the “invocation speaker”) is selected from among a wide pool of the Township’s clergy, on a rotating basis, the invocation speaker shall be selected according to the following procedure:
 - a. The designee of the Supervisor of the Township (the “designee”) shall compile and maintain a database (the “Congregations List”) of the religious congregations with an established presence in the Township.
 - b. The Congregations List shall be compiled by referencing the listing for “churches,” “congregations,” or other religious assemblies in the Township. All religious congregations with an established presence in the Township are eligible to be included in the Congregations List, and any such congregation can confirm its inclusion by specific written request to the designee.
 - c. The policy is intended to be and shall be applied in a way that is all-inclusive of every diverse religious congregation in the Township. The Congregation’s List is compiled and used for purposes of logistics, efficiency, and equal opportunity for all of the community’s religious leaders, who may themselves choose whether to respond to the Board’s invitation and participate. Should a question arise as to the authenticity of a religious congregation, the designee shall refer to criteria used by the Internal Revenue Service in its determination of those religious organizations that would legitimately qualify for IRC § 501(c)(3) tax exempt status.
 - d. The Congregations List shall also include the name and contact information of any chaplain who may serve the Township Police or Fire departments.
 - e. The Congregations List shall also include the name and contact information of any religious congregation located outside the Township if such religious congregation is attended by at least one resident of the Township and such resident requests the inclusion of said religious congregation by specific written communication to the designee.
 - f. The Congregations List shall be updated, by reasonable efforts of the designee, in November of each calendar year.
 - g. Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this policy, and on or about January 1 of each calendar year thereafter, the designee shall mail an invitation addressed to the person who is the religious leader of each congregation listed on the Congregations List.
 - h. The invitation shall be dated at the top of the page, signed by the Supervisor or designee at the bottom of the page, and read substantially as follows:

"Dear [insert name of religious leader]:

I am very pleased to be writing to you today to inform you of the policy which has been adopted by the Charter Township of White Lake Board of Trustees to invite members of the clergy in and around White Lake Township to voluntarily offer an invocation before the beginning of its meetings, for the benefit and blessing of the Board and all of White Lake Township. As the leader of one of our many religious congregations with an established presence in the local community, you are invited to provide this important service at an upcoming meeting of the Board of Trustees.

If you are willing to assist the Board in this regard, please send a written reply at your earliest convenience to [insert name of the designee] at the address included on this letterhead. Clergy are scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis. The Board of Trustees typically meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m., although sometimes special meetings may be set as well as a cancellation of a regular meeting. These meetings are open to the public and regular board meetings are available for viewing live or recorded on the Township's website.

This opportunity is voluntary, and you are free to offer the invocation according to the dictates of your own conscience. However, please try not to exceed no more than three (3) minutes for your presentation. To maintain a spirit of respect for all, the Board requests only that the opportunity not be exploited as an effort to convert others to the particular faith of the invocation speaker, nor to disparage any faith or belief different than that of the invocation speaker.

On behalf of the Charter Township of White Lake Board of Trustees, I thank you in advance for considering this invitation and I look forward to your response in the near future."

3. As the invitation letter indicates, the respondents to the invitation shall be scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis to deliver the invocation. In the event an eligible member of the clergy believes that the staff has not complied with the terms of this policy, the clergy member has the right to have the matter reviewed by the Board.
4. No invocation speaker shall receive compensation for his or her service.
5. No guidelines or limitations shall be issued regarding an invocation's content, except that the Board shall request by the language of this policy that no invocation should proselytize or advance any faith or disparage the religious faith or non-religious view of others or exceed three (3) minutes in length.
6. The designee shall make every reasonable effort to ensure that a variety of eligible invocation speakers are scheduled for the Board meetings. In any event, no invocation speaker shall be scheduled to offer an invocation at consecutive meetings of the Board, or at more than four (4) Board meetings in any calendar year.
7. Neither the Board nor the designee shall engage in any prior inquiry, review of, or involvement in, the content of any invocation to be offered by an invocation speaker.

8. To clarify the Board's intentions, as stated herein above, the following disclaimer shall be included in at least ten (10)-point font at the bottom of any printed agenda, program or schedule of events published by the Board:

"Any invocation that may be offered before the official start of the Board meeting shall be the voluntary offering of a private citizen, to and for the benefit of the Board. The views or beliefs expressed by the invocation speaker have not been previously reviewed or approved by the Board and do not necessarily represent the religious beliefs or views of the Board in part or as a whole. No member of the community is required to attend or participate in the invocation and such decision will have no impact on their right to actively participate in the business of the Board."

9. The Supervisor or any Board member designated by the Supervisor shall introduce the invocation speaker following the invocation and invite only those who wish to show respect for the traditional observances and/or the Board to stand.
10. This policy is not intended and shall not be implemented or construed in any way, to affiliate the Board with, nor express the Board's preference for, any faith or religious denomination. Rather, this policy is intended to acknowledge and express the Board's respect for the diversity of religious denominations and faiths represented and practiced among the citizens of the Township.