



PHOTOS/PAUL WILLIAMS III

John P. Kee sings at University Park Baptist Church's benefit concert for Hurricane Katrina victims. The event was held last week at the church's Beatties Ford Road campus. Evacuees like Willie Gleason and Donald Jackson, a deacon in his home church in New Orleans, attended the concert. Funds donated at the church went to victims of Katrina staying in Charlotte.

Upstate ACLU chapter wants to remove Jesus from prayers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA—The president of the Piedmont chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union wants three Upstate governments to stop mentioning Jesus Christ in prayers before council meetings.

The ACLU sent letters to city councils in Anderson and Seneca and the Oconee County Council asking them to follow a recent federal court ruling.

In July 2004, a three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower judge's decision that prayers before meetings of the Great Falls Town Council were unconstitutional because by mentioning Jesus' name, they honored one faith over another. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the town's appeal.

Mike Cubelo of the ACLU said the organization will take the councils to court if they don't change their prayers.

Anderson City Council rotates the prayer between its nine members and has no requirement the invocation follow a particular faith, Mayor Richard Shirley said.

"We don't view this as establishment of religion. It's totally free. I feel pretty strongly about that," Shirley said.

The council will likely ask the city's attorney to review the letter, said Shirley, who has previously said he would resign if the method of handling prayers is changed.

The ACLU also sent a letter to Attorney General Henry McMaster, asking him to issue guidelines to councils. McMaster backed Great Falls during its court fight.

In his letter to McMaster, Cubelo repeated a request by the ACLU in July that McMaster's office issue guidelines to help local governing

bodies know what is allowed in prayers.

"Obviously, there is a problem that needs to be dealt with by your office," Cubelo wrote.

In his reply, McMaster said the ACLU's request should be sent to the cities involved and he could not issue guidelines because the issue could again land in the courts.

McMaster spokesman Mark Plowden said Monday the attorney general has not changed his mind since the letter was written.

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Anniversary Banquet
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Guest Speaker: Dr. Charles Booth
Mt. Olivet Baptist Church
Columbus, OH

Sunday, September 25th 6:00 p.m.
University Park Baptist Church
6029 Beatties Ford Road

Guest Speaker: Dr. John Guns
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