



## Focus on Religious Freedom

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***"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong."***  
1 Corinthians 16:13

### **Defending Freedom to Pray in Public Americans Who Are Not Afraid to Show Their Faith in Public**

The American Center for Law & Justice (ACLJ) will ask the U.S. Supreme Court to consider a long legal battle concerning a public prayer vigil in Ocala, Florida. The litigation has been in the court system for 8 years and in July, 2022, a decision from the Eleventh Circuit opened the way to a Supreme Court appeal where this case has the potential to achieve legal landmark status.

The circumstances of the case are as follows: In 2014, the City of Ocala experienced a crime spree causing serious injury to several children. The police knew the identity of the shooters but were unable to persuade frightened witnesses to testify. Following community policing standards, Police Chief Graham met with local leaders who suggested the police department reach out to the faith-based community for help persuading witnesses to come forward. These leaders decided to hold a community prayer vigil, planned and organized by private citizens.

Volunteer chaplains led the vigil that was widely supported and well attended. At the request of the organizers, Chief Graham posted a letter encouraging unity and prayer and attendance at the vigil. Atheists, offended by the idea of a prayer vigil, demanded city officials cancel the event and later sued the City for allegedly promoting the vigil.

Now, 8 years later, following reversals at the lower courts, this case will be presented to the Supreme Court. The ACLJ petition, on behalf of the City of Ocala, will be the first to raise the issue of whether "offended observer" standing is sufficient to bring a case. Recently, commenting on the decision in another case, Justice Gorsuch and Justice Thomas said that the lower courts "invented observer standing for Establishment Clause cases in the 1970s in response to this Court's decision" in a similar lawsuit that has recently been overturned.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus, the ACLJ is hopeful that the Supreme Court will take up this important case that will be a major moment for prayer and religious liberty.

***"The Secret to Happiness is Freedom; The Secret to Freedom is Courage."***  
***Thucydides, Greek Philosopher***

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