


WATCHTOWER
Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

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RECEIVED DEC 31 2014

December 19, 2014

Wayne Burkhart, Chairperson
Board of Selectmen
Town Hall
P.O. Box 308
Monterey, MA 01245-0308

Re: Jehovah's Witnesses

Dear Mr. Burkhart:

We represent the interests of Jehovah's Witnesses. Our ministers informed us that on November 18, 2014, a Town of Monterey police officer advised a group of our ministers that they must obtain a permit before they can engage in their public ministry. The officer made them stop their ministerial activity. As you may not be aware of this situation, we are writing to inform you of it and of well-established constitutional law that affects the application of the Town of Monterey's permit ordinance to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Jehovah's Witnesses seek to speak to people about the Bible and offer Bible-based literature, at no cost, to those who are interested. As part of their public ministry, they speak to individuals at their homes and offer free home Bible studies. They do not go from house to house to seek contributions, nor do they engage in sales activity.

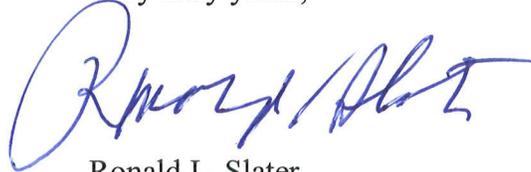
As you may be aware, on June 17, 2002, the United States Supreme Court in an 8-1 decision held that canvassing/solicitation-permit ordinances are unconstitutional as applied against the public ministry of Jehovah's Witnesses. In *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. v. Village of Stratton*, 536 U.S. 150 (2002), the Court struck down Stratton, Ohio's ordinance, which had required Jehovah's Witnesses to register prior to engaging in their house-to-house ministry. The Court stated in part:

It is offensive—not only to the values protected by the First Amendment, but to the very notion of a free society—that in the context of everyday public discourse a citizen must first inform the government of her desire to speak to her neighbors and then obtain a permit to do so. Even if the issuance of permits by the mayor's office is a ministerial task that is performed promptly and at no cost to the applicant, a law requiring a permit to engage in such speech constitutes a dramatic departure from our national heritage and constitutional tradition.

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Any ordinance that the Town of Monterey would use to require Jehovah's Witnesses to obtain a permit prior to engaging in their public ministry would be similarly unconstitutional. Therefore, we have advised our ministers accordingly. We trust that you will ensure that there will be no future interference with their ministry. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,



Ronald L. Slater
Associate General Counsel

RLS:dse