

## *Eagle Mountain International Church*

### **Where Do You Stand on Religious Freedom?**

**Pastor George Pearsons – Sunday, November 1, 2020**

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**A. Proverbs 29:2 — When the Righteous Are In Authority, the People Rejoice: but when the Wicked Rule, the People Mourn**

1. Over the last two months, we have outlined what the two political party platforms say about issues important to us.
  - a. Abortion
  - b. Israel
  - c. The Supreme Court and Judges
  - d. Same-Sex Marriage
  - e. Comprehensive Sex Education
  - f. The Equality Act
2. We compared the platforms and determined which one best aligned with God's Word.
3. When I asked Lord what He wanted me to say as we approach Tuesday, He said, "Talk about religious freedom."
4. We know what it is like when an administration does not support the Church.
5. What a difference it is when we have an administration that supports the Church and calls upon the leaders for spiritual help.

**B. My Introduction to Donald J. Trump — Candidate for President**

It was Tuesday, June 21, 2016. Pastor Terri and I were invited along with 1,000 Evangelical leaders to a meeting at the Marriott Marquis in New York City. The keynote speaker of this event was Donald Trump. At the time, we weren't quite sure who we were going to vote for. The "jury" was still out. I had seen Donald Trump on television and really wondered about him.

After we heard from some notable leaders, the time came for Mr. Trump to speak. He entered confidently and smiling from stage left. The audience was warm and welcoming. I clapped for him . . . and wondered.

Mr. Trump made some opening comments. He then sat down opposite Governor Mike Huckabee. The Governor moderated the question and answer session.

The second question of the morning came from Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family: "Mr. Trump, where do you stand on religious freedom?"

To answer his question, Mr. Trump began by telling a story. He was entertaining some pastors in his office at Trump Tower in New York. He pointed to the street below and told the pastors, “Those people down there have more freedom to say what they believe than you.”

He told us that the clergy is largely muzzled and dominated by fear about expressing their views on elections. He told us he couldn’t understand the fear of churches losing their 501(c)(3) status if they spoke about political issues. He said, “This shouldn’t be so.”

He then said something I have never heard any politician or candidate say. He spoke about the “terrible Lyndon Johnson Amendment.”

What is “The Johnson Amendment?” It is a 1954 provision in the U.S. Tax Code that prohibits all 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates. This effects organizations from charitable foundations to universities and churches.

He challenged us to not be ruled by fear.

I was encouraged and amazed. But that was not all.

Once again, I heard him say something I had never heard any politician or candidate ever say.

He said that we have become so politically correct that we can’t function as a country. He told us that under his administration, we were going to say “Merry Christmas” again!

“And, to fire a coach for praying on the field — those days are over!”

During the session, he expressed support for Israel, having a pro-life Supreme Court and building a wall to protect our borders and stop drugs from pouring into our country. He spoke about the military and how we needed to bring it back to its full strength, allowing Generals to lead, and reversing policies that would enable service personnel to practice religious freedom.

He had gone far past his allotted time to speak, but he seemed to enjoy our company. His closing remark: “There is nothing more important than to talk to you today. You are the most powerful group in our nation.”

After Mr. Trump left the room, we all took time to pray over the nation. How good and pleasant it was for the brethren to dwell together in unity.

### **C. The Johnson Amendment Comment Was Not an Empty Campaign Promise**

1. On May 4, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order that directed the Executive Branch to limit its enforcement of “The Johnson Amendment.”
2. It also limited any other adverse action against any individual or religious organization for speaking about moral or political issues from a religious perspective.
3. It required that all executive departments must “to the greatest extent and to the extent permitted by law, respect and protect the freedom of persons and organizations to engage in religious and political speech.”
4. Specifically, the Department of Treasury should not take any “adverse action” against any individual, house of worship or other religious organization because the individual or organization speaks on moral or political issues from a religious perspective.”
5. The President’s ultimate plan is to completely eradicate the Johnson Amendment.

### **D. Other Administration Religious Freedom Accomplishments**

1. On January 18, 2018, Health and Human Services announced a new Conscience and Religious Freedom Division within its Office of Civil Rights. This new division was established to enforce federal laws that protect conscience rights and religious freedom.
2. On April 30, 2018, during a press conference with Nigeria’s President, President Trump raised the issue of religious freedom and the killing of Christians in that country — bringing attention to an issue that had largely been neglected by other government officials.
3. On May 14, 2018, the U.S. Embassy relocated to Jerusalem. It coincided with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Israeli Declaration of Independence.
4. On July 30, 2018, the Department of Justice (D.O.J.) announced a Religious Liberty Task Force to fully implement religious liberty guidance and policy across all components of the D.O.J.
5. On August 27, 2018, the President and his wife hosted the very first state dinner celebrating evangelical leadership at the White House. Kenneth and Gloria Copeland were there with Franklin Graham and others. The President opened the floor to any minister who wanted to speak.
6. On September 23, 2019, President Trump hosted a meeting during The U.N. General Assembly and gave a speech solely on the topic of religious freedom. During the speech, he announced a U.S. policy initiative to protect places of worship, pledging an additional \$25 million in funding to protect religious sites and relics. This is the first time a U.S. president has hosted a meeting focused solely on religious freedom at the U.N.

7. On January 16, 2020, the Departments of Education and Justice issued guidance on constitutionally protected prayer and religious expression in public elementary and secondary schools. This guidance ensures that prayer in schools is properly protected and not unconstitutionally prohibited or curtailed.
8. On January 24, 2020, President Trump became the first sitting president to give remarks in person at the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C. In his address, he stated the eternal truth that every child is a sacred gift from God and reiterated his effort to defend the dignity and sanctity of every human life.
9. On April 14, 2020, the D.O.J. filed a statement of interest protecting the religious liberty of church goers in Greenville, Mississippi. During the coronavirus pandemic, the city of Greenville banned all religious services, even those that were able to abide by social distancing standards with drive-in church services.
10. On April 17, 2020, The Department of Homeland Security included, “clergy for essential support” in its list of personnel and entities deemed “essential” for purposes of responding to the coronavirus.

**E. In Addition to His Religious Freedom Initiatives, Something Significant has Happened to Our President over the last Four Years**

1. He has surrounded himself with many evangelical ministers, like Paula White Cain, Bishop Harry Jackson, Franklin Graham and Brother and Sister Copeland.
2. They have become a tremendous support to our president.
3. We have also witnessed an unprecedented spirit of corporation between the Church and the White House.
4. We are seeing our nation’s spiritual awakening.
5. Even the President is experiencing a spiritual transformation.

October 20, 2020 Times West Virginia Article

“Trump, confirmed a Presbyterian, now identifies as a ‘non-denominational Christian’

In an exclusive interview with the Religion News Service, President Trump said that he no longer identifies as a Presbyterian. He now sees himself as a non-denominational Christian.

“Though I was confirmed at a Presbyterian church as a child, I now consider myself to be a non-denominational Christian.”

Saying that his parents “taught me the importance of faith and prayer from a young age,” Trump went on to say that “Melania and I have gotten to visit some amazing churches and meet with great faith leaders from around the world. During the unprecedented COVID-19 outbreak, I tuned into several virtual church services and know that millions of Americans did the same.”

Asked whether he learned anything spiritually from his experience of contracting COVID-19, Trump responded that he and Melania “felt the prayers of Americans from all across the country — and even around the world” when he was recovering at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

“When I said, ‘There were miracles coming down from heaven.’ I meant it. Melania and I are very thankful to God for looking out for our family and returning us to good health.”

Trump praised the faith of his evangelical supporters. He said Franklin Graham had visited the Oval Office to pray for him earlier this month.

He expressed his admiration for his evangelical advisers’ willingness to reopen their churches in the face of the pandemic.

“These amazing people love the U.S.A. and have a genuine desire to work together for the betterment of all Americans. I appreciate their prayers and am encouraged by their great faith.”

**F. Psalm 33:12 (NIV) — Blessed is the Nation whose God is the LORD, the People He Chose for His Inheritance**