

Please consider the following before condemning us

The City of Dearborn has been under attack for several years by a group identifying themselves as Acts 17 Apologetics. They arrive in Dearborn with the intent to disrupt a local cultural festival and misrepresent facts in order to further their mission of raising funds through emotional response. The funds they raise are then used to finance travel and cameras to disrupt other events in other cities.

In our case, the targeted event is not about the Muslim faith or its believers. It is a Middle Eastern cultural festival sponsored by a Chamber of Commerce and a local charitable service organization. Neither of these two entities have a religious alignment.

Like events in cities all over our nation, this festival has a variety of entertainment and interests, including rides, games, performances, foods, souvenirs, and community information. Also like other events, it relies on sponsorships and fees to cover its costs. Large tents are set up to house organizations and businesses that want to have access to the thousands of people attending this event. These groups pay a modest fee for the privilege and are allowed to carry out their activity in an assigned space within the tents. There is no restriction placed on any lawful activity carried out in this manner, including preaching the word of God.

This past year, five Christian organizations and two Muslim organizations chose this lawful method of reaching the attendees. This is similar to past years and there has never been a problem or controversy about this type of preaching or religious engagement. The total number of table vendors at the festival exceeds eighty, so these seven faith-based groups represent a relatively small aspect of the festival. In all the materials released by Acts 17 Apologetics they have failed to mention this manner of preaching and evidencing the teaching of Jesus Christ, even though they have been offered the same opportunity each year.

In addition to the booths, we have a free speech zone at the festival for those that want free access to the festival to promote their message. This space was utilized this past year by two different Christian groups who were allowed to preach and proselytize the entire weekend without any interference. Acts 17 Apologetics did not mention this either, even though they were within 30 feet of this space when they pretended to be arrested.

Yes, I said pretended to be arrested. In a video they have posted on their website, they are standing near the Ferris wheel when some police officers approached them on Saturday, June 19. They lead you to believe that they were arrested shortly thereafter for passing out Christian flyers. Although they were temporarily detained for violating the festival rules regarding the location of the distribution of literature, they were not arrested on that day. And they were never arrested for passing out flyers.

On Friday, June 18, they behaved very differently than what you saw on film from Saturday, June 19. They were not handing out flyers but were aggressively engaging passers-by in confrontational debate when they were arrested and cited for Breach of the Peace and Failure to Obey the Lawful Order of a Police Officer. See www.cityofdearborn.org for more details.

Acts 17 always retained the right to carry out their activities in a lawful manner at the festival. The video taken on Saturday illustrates that the group returned to the festival after the four arrests on Friday.

Acts 17 Apologetics has been at the Arab Festival in past years and is well aware of the written policy with regard to crowd control. They are also aware of a federal court decision in favor of the Dearborn policy of controlled access to the festival site.

This is standard practice at events all over the country. A site is identified and authorized by the government entity as a special event site. In the case of the Arab

Festival, it is a number of commercial blocks between the rear alley accesses behind the businesses on either side of the commercial road.

Despite knowing this, Acts 17 Apologetics lead the viewers of the distorted video to believe that they are on public sidewalks. For the duration of the three-day event, the public sidewalks in front of the stores and businesses in the event district are no longer “public” in terms of the application of the First Amendment. They are in an area controlled to protect public safety during the event because of the extreme number of people occupying a space that was never intended to support that much activity. This practice has been upheld by the Supreme Court in “Hefron vs. International Society for Krishna Consciousness”

http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0452_0640_ZS.html

And that is what the Federal Court upheld in June.

<http://www.cityofdearborn.org/images/stories/PDF/fedcourtopinion.pdf>

The court decisions protect every community that must balance personal freedom with the need to provide public safety during an unusual situation.

At the time he was arrested on Friday, June 18, Mr. Wood had gathered a large crowd around him, blocking a key access point between the tents. The crowd was forced to grow bigger solely because people could not pass. Those who created this public danger did so with the knowledge that they were violating the laws because they wanted to be arrested while their cohorts were actively recording the event for posting on the web. They knew that they could inflame the passions of viewers who would be taken in by their misrepresentation of what was really going on. They have even found media that would put them on air to repeat these inaccurate representations without seeking information or the truth from others.

It makes a good news story to say that a community is infringing on peoples’ rights especially when it is couched in the true bias of generating negative feelings about

another religion. The real violation of First Amendment rights occurs with Acts 17 Apologetics trying to imply they were the victim when the real violation is their attack on the City of Dearborn for having tolerance for all religions including believers in the Koran.

Dearborn is a true American City that welcomes everyone in the full spirit of our great constitution. We are a community of faith that is dedicated to the welfare of everyone whether resident or guest. These gross misrepresentations have caused us to come together in a stronger way.

Almost a year ago, after earlier attacks by Acts 17 Apologetics on Dearborn, I hosted a meeting with the Dearborn Area Ministerial Association (DAMA), a group of mostly Christian religious leaders, but inclusive of all faiths in Dearborn. I asked them to review the video from the 2009 festival, examine the facts and measure the impact on our community. The discussion was frank and sincere.

After that meeting with DAMA, a separate group of Dearborn Christian evangelical ministers released a written criticism of the actions and misrepresentations of Acts 17 Apologetics.

http://www.fairlanealliance.org/downloads/letter_concerning_acts_17.pdf

They released their statement only after trying to contact Acts 17 Apologetics to engage them in a discussion of how to achieve the goal of converting others to Christ. They were unsuccessful in getting a response from Acts 17.

The truth is Christian evangelists are active at the Arab Festival. They participate in lawful ways. While many are local, some, like world renowned minister and author Josh McDowell, come to the festival because it offers a large number of people who can be engaged in the message of the New Testament. He and the other evangelists followed the rules and have been successful in achieving their goals. Mr. McDowell posted positive recordings of his experience at the festival in 2009

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cIH1F7KGWnY> and 2010

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzh3MYv1L4A> . These videos provide a sharp contrast to the recordings of Acts 17 Apologetics and, better yet, they have only truth as their motive.

Dearborn is not your enemy nor are the people who live here. People who would promote hatred and lies to get others to act in ways that are contrary to what America stands for are the real enemy for all lovers of our country. History is full of horrific events that were manufactured by lies to get good people to act purely emotionally to achieve the deceiver's ends. We hope that you will choose to become informed and avoid being taken in by people that have yet to share true faith with anyone in Dearborn.

Sincerely,

Mayor John B. O'Reilly Jr.

City of Dearborn