

Canadian man sues to stop 'anguish' of Lord's Prayer

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c. 2012 Religion News Service TORONTO (RNS) A Canadian man is suing his local government to stop the recitation of the Lord's Prayer before council meetings, saying the practice causes him "anguish, discrimination, exclusion, rejection and loss of enjoyment of life."

Peter Ferguson is seeking \$5,000 in damages along with a court order for the local county council to stop opening its meetings with the Christian prayer. Ferguson, who lives in the Ontario hamlet of Kimberley said in an affidavit that he is a nonbeliever and that the prayer breaches his constitutional rights.

"My distress from this discrimination, exclusion and rejection have reduced my ability to enjoy living and participating in a democratic country and in municipal affairs," Ferguson said.

Ferguson and another Ontario resident taking similar action against her city council are basing their case on a 1999 ruling by Ontario's Court of Appeal, which ordered the town of Penetanguishene to stop reciting the Lord's Prayer. The court said the practice was unconstitutional because it "imposed a Christian moral tone on public deliberations."

Both plaintiffs are represented by a lawyer for Secular Ontario, a small group that seeks to stop the public recitation of the Lord's Prayer in at least 18 cities, towns and counties across the province.

Ferguson told reporters he had been trying for over a year to persuade his local government to stop praying and turning council meetings into a "Christian zone."

"This has nothing to do with my personal beliefs," he said. "I care about the law. I care about being fair."

A local spokesman said the council hopes to avoid a legal battle and will try to make a decision "that is reasonable but also respectful of Grey County's heritage, and also respectful of cost to the taxpayer."