

# Speak Up, St. Louis:

## Opening Reflection & Prayer

Memo Authored by Policy Team, Office of the President  
September 30, 2025

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**Policy Request:** “My idea is that St Louis, once in chambers, no longer does an opening prayer. Instead, we collectively sing Thin Lizzy’s 1976 classic, The Boys are Back In Town.” ([Click here to view the idea](#))

**Author:** Amanda Huginkiss

**Date Submitted:** September 11, 2025

**Date Threshold Reached:** September 23, 2025

### Overview

This policy request has to do with how the Board of Aldermen meetings are conducted, specifically the Full Board Meetings which are regularly held on Fridays in the Chambers. There are two parts to this request - the first of which is for the Board of Aldermen to no longer have an opening prayer, and the second is for the Board of Aldermen to sing a particular song.

No changes to municipal code or Board of Aldermen rules are required.

### Background

Every legislative session, the Board of Aldermen adopts rules on Meetings, Order of Business, Procedures, Debate, Decorum, and Voting. The 2025-2026 rules can be viewed here: <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/aldermen/rules/rules.cfm>

Under Rule 12, which establishes the Regular Order of Business, there is an “Opening Reflection or Prayer” following the Call to Order and Roll Call.

The Board of Aldermen also has rules about how its rules are adopted, amended, or suspended. Rule 83 states, “The Board of Aldermen shall adopt Rules of its proceedings, subject to the Charter, at the beginning of each annual session by a majority vote of the members present at the first meeting of the regular session which is held on the third Tuesday in April. Thereafter, during the said session, any Rule, may be abolished, altered, amended or suspended upon concurrence by two thirds of the members present provided such action is not superseded by ordinance, the Charter, or state statute.”

### Precedent

For many years, there was a short suggested prayer in the rules following Roll Call as follows: “Almighty God, source of all authority, we humbly ask guidance in our deliberations and wisdom in our conclusions. Amen.” This suggested prayer was removed from the rules in the 2023-2024 session as part of a larger effort to modernize, streamline, and clarify the Board of Aldermen rules. The option for a reflection in addition to a prayer was first adopted in the 2023-2024 rules by the Board of Aldermen.

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### Current Practices

The opening reflection or prayer is chosen by the Deputy Chief of Staff Christine Ingrassia in consultation with members of the Board of Aldermen. She states, "I schedule individuals to open each Board of Aldermen meeting with a reflection, poem, or prayer. The President's office is committed to inviting reflection leaders who represent the backgrounds, traditions, and experiences within our city." She also conducts outreach to find speakers to share reflections on current events, including commemorative and awareness months or days.

### Previous Speakers

- **September 26:** Peggy Neufeld, Everytown for Gun Safety
- **September 19:** Norman Akers, Osage Nation
- **September 12:** Rosemary Britts, Sickle Cell Association in honor of Sickle Cell Awareness Month
- **June 27:** Maxi Glamour, Trans Housing Initiative St. Louis in honor of Pride Month
- **May 16:** Jia Lian Yang, Forward Through Ferguson
- **May 9:** Suzanne King, Mental Health Awareness of Eastern Missouri in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month
- **May 30:** Pastor John Watson, Jr., Maple Temple Church of God in Christ
- **April 25:** Dr. Zaid Numan Mahir, Arab Cultural Center in honor of Arab American Heritage Month



*Maxi Glamour, a non-binary multi-disciplinary drag artist and third ward committeeperson, delivers a reflection at the Board of Aldermen on June 27, 2025.*

### Analysis

An opening prayer is no longer a common occurrence at the Board of Aldermen. Since the adoption of new rules in the 2023-2024 session, there have been a total of 97 Full Board Meetings. Of these meetings, 59% were opened with a secular reflection compared to 23% with a religious prayer. The remaining 18% of meetings had neither a reflection or prayer.

Opening Reflection or Prayer at Board of Aldermen Meetings			
As of September 30, 2025			
Legislative Session	Type of Opening Reflection or Prayer		
	Secular	Religious	None
2023-2024	18	14	9
2024-2025	25	4	6
2025-2026 (partial)	14	4	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>

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### Legal Analysis

STL TV is the City of St. Louis' local government access channel, where viewers can watch weekly Board of Aldermen meetings, mayoral press conferences and more. It airs on cable channel 992, digital 108.10 or u-verse 99. STL TV broadcasts the Board's meetings as part of the City's commitment to transparency and public engagement. Broadcasts must comply with copyright regulations.

Because music is protected by copyright, television stations generally need a public performance license to broadcast songs, unless the music is in the public domain or released under a Creative Commons license that allows for broadcast use. STL TV does not hold blanket licenses with any performing rights organizations such as ASCAP, BMI, or SESAC, and therefore it cannot air music protected by copyright.

### Recommendations

The Rules do not require an opening prayer. Unless the author seeks a blanket prohibition on prayer, no changes are required.

The City does not have the necessary licenses in place to comply with copyright law. Additional funding would need to be allocated to STL TV for them to purchase a license to broadcast copyrighted music. We do not recommend moving forward with implementing this recommendation at this time, although it should be revisited during the Budget hearings.

### President's Comments

The President does not support a prohibition on prayer in the Chambers.

The President would support a request by members of the Board for the playing of recorded music or live performance of music and for the required allocation of funding to STL TV for the purchase of the required licenses. However, the President does not seek to prescribe any particular song, nor shall she proactively lead the Board of Aldermen in song on a hot mike. She would support the playing of Thin Lizzie's "The Boys are Back in Town" on the occasion of St. Louis securing an NFL or NBA team.

