



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 2, 2020

Atheist Group Targeting Miami Church Over Trump MAGA Rally

The atheist Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) is targeting a Hispanic congregation in Miami over its plans to host President Trump and a Make America Great Again (MAGA) rally January 3. In a letter to the IRS, the FFRF charged that Ministerio Internacional El Rey Jesús (King Jesus International Ministry), pastored by the Reverend Guillermo Maldonado, is ignoring IRS rules that prohibit nonprofit groups, including churches, from being involved with political campaigns.



"We understand that King Jesus Ministry will host a political rally for President Trump on Friday, January 3, 2020 at 5:00 PM EST," reads the letter to Mary Epps, who heads Exempt Organizations Examinations for the IRS. "We are informed that the church's leader and pastor, Apostle Moldonado, urged his congregation to attend this political rally."

The letter goes on to charge that, in hosting the rally and urging parishioners to attend, "King Jesus Ministry appears to have inappropriately used its religious organization and 501(c)(3) status to intervene in a political campaign. It violated IRS regulations by seemingly expressing its support for a candidate in the November 2020 presidential campaign."

In its letter the FFRF asks the IRS to "commence an immediate investigation into King Jesus Ministry's violation prohibiting 501(c)(3) organizations from participating in and/or intervening in a political campaign. The IRS should take appropriate action to remedy any violations that occurred or which continue to occur."

An FFRF press release explained that the IRS provision in question, known as the Johnson Amendment, "specifies that 501(c)(3) organizations, which include churches and other religious organizations, are prohibited from participating in or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." While leaders of churches or religious organizations may express their opinions on political matters as individuals, they are, according to this rule, precluded from making "partisan comments in official organization publications or at official functions of the organization."

The FFRF charged that while President Trump "has claimed that the Presidential Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty 'got rid of' the Johnson Amendment, the order did no such thing. The Department of Justice has twice disavowed this notion in open court, after FFRF sued to prove that an executive order cannot overturn enacted legislation. The Johnson Amendment remains in full effect, and churches may not promote political campaigns."

In response, a spokesman for Pastor Moldonado and El Rey Jesus emphasized that while the Miami church facility was the site of the public rally, the church was not officially hosting or organizing the event, but is simply opening its doors and joining with other Christians in attendance to ask God to bless our leaders and our president with wisdom to guide our nation.



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On its website the church notes that it “does not endorse any political candidates or engage in political campaigns. It is a religious organization that ministers to the community. While we advocate for issues we care deeply about, such as family and respect for life, we do not take positions in political campaigns.”

Thus far, the IRS has not commented on the event, and in its own announcement promoting the MAGA rally, the Trump campaign said that it “will bring together Evangelicals from across the nation who support President Trump’s re-election.”

The FFRF’s intrusion has had little apparent impact on stopping the MAGA event, or discouraging attendance. The congregation counts many undocumented immigrants among its attendees and members, and Moldonado encouraged them to attend the rally, telling them that they would be safe. In light of President Trump’s campaign to stanch the flow of illegal immigrants into the nation, some observers questioned the wisdom of inviting undocumented individuals. However, Moldonado said that no one would be checking anyone’s papers. “I ask you, do you think I would do something where I would endanger my people?” said Maldonado. “I’m not that dumb.”

He added, “I don’t think the president would do such a thing. Don’t put your race or your nationality over being a Christian. Be mature.... If you want to come, do it for your pastor. That’s a way of supporting me.”

Image: Screenshot of the symbol for Ministerio Internacional El Rey Jesús



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