

Judicial Inquiry Commission

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MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36104

November 13, 1998

The Judicial Inquiry Commission has considered your request for an advisory opinion whether a judge may serve on the host committee for benefit banquets to be held for the Justice Fellowship, Prison Fellowship of Alabama, and Neighbors Who Care. The core issue for the Justice Fellowship has been stated to be protection of religious liberty following the decision of the United States Supreme Court in Bourne, including passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Prison Fellowship activities include an in-prison evangelistic program. Neighbors Who Care provides ministry to crime victims, including crisis response teams and a homicide clean up program. Host Committee members are expected to, *inter alia*, serve as advisors, advocates, and representatives for these three organizations; lend the use of their names to banquet invitations and programs; serve as hosts at their tables at the banquets to help develop relationships; participate in ministry opportunities; obtain church support and involvement; make a financial contribution to the cost of the banquets; and, recruit other committee members.

It is the opinion of the Commission that a judge may not serve as a member of the host committee described. This conclusion is based upon consideration of the totality of obligations accepted by a host committee member, and the restrictions in Canons 5B and 2C of the Alabama Canons of Judicial Ethics. The Commission is particularly concerned with duties of a host committee member that appear likely to reflect adversely on the judge's impartiality and thus cause disqualification from cases coming before her, that may call upon the judge to be a legal advisor, and that may lend the prestige of the judge's office to the solicitation of funds or other support for the organizations involved.

Yours truly,

JUDICIAL INQUIRY COMMISSION