COMPLAINT

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JURISDICTION

1. This court has jurisdiction over Plaintiffs' claims under 28 U.S.C § 1331, because those claims arise under the Constitution of the United States, under 28 U.S.C. § 1343(a)(3), because those claims seek to redress deprivations, under color of state authority, of rights, privileges and immunities secured by the United States Constitution; and under 28 U.S.C. § 1343(a)(4), because those claims seek to secure equitable relief under an Act of Congress, specifically under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The court also has jurisdiction over Plaintiffs' state law claims under 28 U.S.C. § 1367.

VENUE

2. Venue is proper in the Central District of California under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) because Defendants are located in this District and all of the acts and/or omissions complained of herein have occurred or will occur in the District.

INTRODUCTION

- 3. Symbols of religious faith are the principal means by which organized religion communicates the common belief systems and bond among adherents. Such symbols are instantly and universally recognizable for the religion each exclusively represents. The best known examples are: the cross, as the preeminent symbol of Christianity; the Star of David, as the preeminent symbol of Judaism; and the Crescent and the Star, as the preeminent symbols of Islam.
- 4. The cross is the most readily and widely identifiable of all religious symbols. As both the Ninth Circuit and California state courts have stated, the cross "represents with relative clarity and simplicity the Christian message of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a doctrine at the heart of Christianity." *Ellis v. La Mesa*, 990 F.2d 1518, 1525 (9th Cir. 1993) (quoting *Okrand v. City of Los Angeles*, 207 Cal.App.3d 566, 579-80, 254 Cal.Rptr. 913, 922 (1989)).

- 5. The cross is the iconic Christian symbol. The cross is omnipresent in Christian religious observances and celebrations: for example, as backdrop for baptisms, weddings, Easter sunrise services, Christmas masses. The cross is frequently found in Christian households, on automobile dashboards and as jewelry worn by Christians. Just this past December, *TIME* named Pope Francis as "Person of the Year": the cover photograph showed the Pope wearing a necklace with a large and prominent cross and a ring bearing the cross.
- 6. The universal religious message of the cross to Christians begins with its symbolism as the instrument of the crucifixion and triumph of Jesus Christ and includes the message to all Christians of God's love in sacrificing his son for humanity. This significance is expressed in Scripture: *See, e.g., Colossians* 2:15 ("Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."). Throughout the canonical gospels, Christ states: "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." *Matthew* 10:38-39; 16:24-25; *Mark* 8:34-35; *Luke* 9:23-24, 14:27.
- 7. One of the most famous verses in the New Testament states that acceptance of the doctrine symbolized by the cross that Jesus is the son of God who was crucified for man's salvation provides the means of eternal life. *John* 3:16 ("For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.").
- 8. The same chapter of the New Testament also states that those who do not accept the doctrine symbolized by the Cross will not be saved. *John* 3:18 ("He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."). In other words, by adding the principal symbol of Christianity to a county seal, the county is lending its authority to a symbol that not only signifies that Jesus is the son of God, but also that anyone who does not accept him as the savior is unworthy of salvation.

- 9. Notwithstanding the clear and unequivocal religious significance of the cross, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved on January 7, 2014 the restoration of a cross to the official County seal, placing it conspicuously and starkly on the image of the San Gabriel Mission. Just ten years earlier, in 2004, the Board removed the cross from the County seal in acknowledgment of the fact that its continued presence constituted an endorsement in both actuality and appearance of religious preference. Indeed, in the initial seal, adopted in 1957, the Board included the cross to expressly communicate the influence of the church. Neither the 1957 seal nor the 2014 seal even attempts to moderate the cross's religious message or the preferred status of Christianity with respect to Los Angeles County by including either the symbols of other secular organizations or institutions or comparable symbols of other religions.
- 10. The County seal is affixed prominently in County government buildings, including the County Hall of Administration and other seats of County governmental authority, on the uniforms and badges of County governmental officials and law enforcement personnel, on County governmental motor vehicles, and on official County documents and correspondence.
- as a large population which does not affiliate with any religious congregation. According to 2000 County population data published by the Los Angeles Almanac website, of the approximate 58% of County residents who identify as affiliated with a religious congregation, 68.8% (3,806,377) identify as adherents to the Christian faith, 10.2% (564,700) identify as Jewish, 1.7% (92,919) identify as Muslims, 1.3% (70,000) identify as Buddhists, and 1.3% (70,000) identify as Hindu. Nearly four million County residents do not identify as affiliating with any religious congregation.
- 12. The restoration of the cross to the County seal favors the Christian religion over all other religions and divides County residents by religion and by

adherence or non-adherence to religious beliefs. As such, the County seal including the restored cross violates the Establishment Clauses of the United States and California Constitutions, and the "No Preference Clause" and the "No Aid Clause" of the California Constitution.

PARTIES

- 13. Plaintiff Reverend Father Ian Elliott Davies has been rector of St. Thomas the Apostle Episcopal Church in Hollywood since 2002. Previously, Father Davies was the assistant priest at the Anglo-Catholic parish of All Saints, Margaret Street, London. He objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols any of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles. St. Thomas the Apostle Hollywood states that it is "Anglo-Catholic by tradition, meaning we have a great respect for both the rich liturgical heritage of the church, and for living the message of social justice proclaimed by Jesus Christ." The symbol of St. Thomas the Apostle is the cross.
- 14. Plaintiff Reverend J. Edwin Bacon, Jr. has been the rector of All Saints Church in Pasadena, California since 1995. Rev. Bacon graduated from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, which named him their Whiteside Distinguished Preacher. In May, 2005, Church Divinity School of the Pacific conferred on Rev. Bacon an honorary Doctor of Ministry degree. In December, 2005, he was named an Honorary Canon of the Cathedral of St. Paul by the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. He objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols of any of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles. All Saints Church's "Mission and Vision" is "[f]ollowing our prophetic call, we seek to embody the inclusive love of God in Christ through Spirituality, Community, and Peace and Justice." All Saints Church describes itself as "worship centered": "Our pastoral, educational and discernment ministries are strengthened and transformed

by gathering for Word, sacrament and corporate prayer." All Saints Church also states that it is "education minded": "We prize learning, seeking to know the mind and will of God through Scripture, reason, tradition and human experience." The symbol of All Saints Church is the cross.

- 15. Plaintiff Shakeel Syed is a member of the Los Angeles Council of Religious Leaders and Past Chairman of the Board of Clergy & Laity for Economic Justice in Los Angeles. Plaintiff Syed is a devout Muslim and a lay leader in the Southern California Muslim community. He regularly speaks about Islam and Muslims at Churches, Synagogues and other houses of worship and at schools and universities. He is a Los Angeles County citizen and taxpayer. Plaintiff Syed regularly comes into contact with the County seal during meetings at various county offices, including at the Sheriff's Department and in visits to the County jail as a volunteer Muslim chaplain. He objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross.
- Shalom in Encino, California since 1970. Rabbi Schulweis is one of the nation's most respected rabbis. He combined a Talmudic education at Yeshiva College with graduate studies in modern philosophical and theological thought at New York University, the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Pacific School of Religion, from which he received his Ph.D in Theology. Rabbi Schulweis has been instrumental in the development of synagogue programs which address issues of Jewish education and interfaith dialogue and is the Founding Chairperson of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, an organization that identifies and awards grants to non-Jews who risked their lives to aid those threatened by Nazis. He has received numerous honors and awards, including the 2008 National Jewish Book Award, the Spirit of the Immortal Chaplains Award (2006), and the Israel Prime Minister's Medal (1975). He objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols of any

of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles. The philosophy of Valley Beth Shalom is to build "a synagogue community committed to the quest for a Jewish life that is Godly, meaningful, and purposeful." Its mission statement includes the following: "[W]e are commanded in the Torah: . . . 'You will be holy, as I am holy,' (*Leviticus* 19)." The symbol of Valley Beth Shalom is the Star of David.

- Universalist Church in Pasadena. She also serves as regional staff for her denomination. She was ordained in 2011. Rev. Little received her M.Div. from Meadville Lombard Theological School in 2010, and was awarded an honor of excellence in religious education. She is a resident and taxpayer of the County of Los Angeles. Rev. Little objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols of any of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles.
- 18. Plaintiff Rabbi John Rosove has been Senior Rabbi of Temple Israel of Hollywood since 1988. He received a Masters in Hebrew Letters from Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion ("HUC-JIR"), Los Angeles and Rabbinic Ordination, from HUC-JIR, New York. Rabbi Rosove describes his mission as "to build Jewish community and draw Jews and their families close to God, the Torah, Jewish tradition, the Jewish people, and the State of Israel as a Jewish national home." The symbol of Temple Israel of Hollywood includes the Star of David. He objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols of any of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles.
- 19. Plaintiff Reverend Peter Laarman recently retired from his position as Executive Director of Progressive Christians Uniting. He was ordained by the United Church of Christ in 1993. Rev. Laarman was called directly from seminary to serve as senior minister at New York City's historic Judson Memorial Church,

where he worked for more than ten years. He is a resident and taxpayer of the County of Los Angeles. He regularly comes into contact with the County seal, including when he attends meetings of the Board of Supervisors. He objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols of any of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles.

- 20. Plaintiff David N. Myers is the Professor and Chair of the UCLA Department of History and former Director of the UCLA Center for Jewish Studies. Dr. Myers received his A.B. from Yale College in 1982, and undertook graduate studies at Harvard and Tel Aviv Universities before completing his doctorate at Columbia in 1991. He has written extensively in the fields of modern Jewish intellectual and cultural history and teaches courses in ancient, medieval and modern Jewish history. Among other topics, Professor Myers has written and taught about the history of anti-Semitism, and is thus cognizant of the recurrent acts of violence against Jews by Christians acting under the cover of the Cross (though often in violation of Church policy). He objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols of any of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles.
- 21. Plaintiff Rabbi Amy Bernstein serves as associate rabbi at Kehillat Israel. Originally from Atlanta, Georgia, she received her B.A. in English Literature and Cultural Anthropology from Northwestern University. Rabbi Bernstein attended the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia for her rabbinic training, which included one year as a visiting graduate student at Ben Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. Prior to coming to Los Angeles, Rabbi Bernstein served as the rabbi of Temple Israel in Duluth, Minnesota for 13 years. As the only rabbi in the Northland Region Rabbi Bernstein represented the Jewish community to the greater Northland community. She served two terms as the President of the Arrowhead Interfaith Council and six years on the Board of Trustees of the College

CALDWELL LESLIE & PROCTOR of St. Scholastica, where she was also on the founding board of the Oreck/Alpern Interreligious Forum. She was a scholar in residence for the Jewish Chautauqua Society and lectured widely throughout the Northland. She objects to and is offended by the Board's decision to alter the County Seal solely to add a cross to it while excluding the symbols of any of the other faiths practiced by citizens of Los Angeles.

- 22. Defendant Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (the "Board") is the governing body of the County of Los Angeles, a charter county. The Board functions as the executive and legislative head of the largest county government in the United States. The population of Los Angeles County exceeds 10 million people. The Board consists of five elected Supervisors: Supervisor Gloria Molina (District No. 1), Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas (District No. 2), Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky (District No. 3), Supervisor Don Knabe (District No. 4) and Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich (District No. 5). The Board is sued in its official capacity. At all times pertinent to the acts and omissions complained of by this lawsuit, the Board was acting under color of state law, thereby violating 42 U.S.C. § 1983.
- 23. Defendant William T Fujioka serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the County of Los Angeles. In this capacity, he oversees implementation of the Board's directives and will be responsible for executing the change to the County seal. Mr. Fujioka is sued in his official capacity. At all times pertinent to the acts and omissions complained of by this lawsuit, he was, and is, acting under color of state law.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

- A. The Board Initially Adopts the Seal in 1957 as a Religious Statement
- 24. The Board of Supervisors of the County of Los Angeles adopted an official seal for Los Angeles County on January 2, 1957. The seal depicted a Latin cross to symbolize the religious influence of the church and the missions of California. The seal also included in separate frames the Roman goddess of gardens

and fruit trees, Pomona, the Spanish galleon San Salvador which sailed into San Pedro Harbor on October 8, 1542, a tuna representing the fishing industry of the county, a cow representing the dairy industry of the county, the Hollywood Bowl, representing the county cultural activities, two stars representing the motion picture and television industries and oil derricks representing oil fields discovered on Signal Hill. The cross was situated over the Hollywood Bowl. Contemporaneous with this adoption, the County submitted documentation to the Secretary of State of California which stated that the presence of the cross on the seal was intended, in part, to represent religion. The seal became effective on March 1, 1957. A copy of the 1957 seal is attached to the complaint as Exhibit 1.

- B. The Board Removes the Cross in 2004 in Recognition that It Represented an Inappropriate Statement of Religious Faith
- 25. The 1957 seal served as the official County seal until 2004. In 2004, the ACLU Foundation of Southern California ("ACLU") stated to County officials that it was prepared to litigate to have the cross removed from the official seal.
- voted to redesign the seal. The resulting seal did not include a cross. In all, the cross, the goddess Pomona and the oil derricks were removed. A sketch of the Mission San Gabriel and an Indian woman carrying a basket were put in the frames on the seal where the cross and Pomona had been situated. No image was substituted for the oil derricks. A copy of the 2004 seal is attached to this complaint as Exhibit 2.
- 27. The removal of the cross proved divisive because of the cross's religious significance. There resulted considerable controversy, which included lengthy and emotional testimony accusing the Board of diminishing the religious significance of the seal along with public protests in opposition to the removal for the same reasons. An editorial in The Los Angeles Times supported removal of the cross from the seal on account of its religious message.

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On June 8, 2004, at the first of two public hearings about the seal, the 28. Board heard hours of testimony from irate citizens and residents who both supported and objected for religious reasons to the removal of the cross. After listening to considerable testimony, Supervisor Yvonne Burke of the Second District stated with respect to the objectors as follows:

> SUP. BURKE: I'VE LISTENED HERE FOR A FEW HOURS AND I KEPT THINKING THAT, IF THIS CASE GOES TO TRIAL, I WOULD HATE FOR THEM TO PLAY THIS HEARING BECAUSE, IF THERE'S EVER ANY QUESTION OF WHAT WAS BEING MOVED FORWARD AND WHAT THE OBJECTION WAS TO THE VOTE THAT HAD BEEN TAKEN, IT WAS CLEARLY, IT WAS A RELIGIOUS ONE. THAT MOST OF THE PEOPLE HERE SPOKE . . . [INTERJECTIONS]

Supervisor Burke, a self-described Christian, was repeatedly interrupted by supporters of maintaining the cross on the seal, which she described as a "religious frenzy."

- Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich of the Fifth District stated during 29. this hearing that ". . . these individuals do have the right of free speech and religious speech is still a freedom of speech that's given to everyone."
- The second public hearing before the Board took place on 30. September 24, 2004. At this hearing, Supervisor Antonovich objected to the depiction of the San Gabriel Mission ultimately adopted because

WHAT IS DEPICTED IS A BACK DOOR, THE REAR END OF THE CHURCH. THAT IS NOT THE SYMBOL OF THE MISSION. THE SYMBOL OF THE MISSION

WAS AN OPEN DOOR TO BRING THE GOOD NEWS

Christians often refer to the gospel (the four books in the Bible that describe the life of Jesus Christ" as the "good news" of redemption through the life and death of Jesus). In fact, "gospel" derives from an Old English word meaning "good news."

C. The Cross Is Restored to the County Seal

- 31. On January 7, 2014, Supervisors Antonovich and Knabe, who had cast the two dissenting votes to the 2004 motion to remove the cross from the then-County seal, introduced a motion to restore a cross to the County seal by placing it on the apex of the roof of the San Gabriel Mission. The motion did not propose any other changes to the seal, nor does the revised seal include any contextualization to even suggest that the addition of the cross serves any secular purpose.
- 32. The motion was opposed by the ACLU and by the Anti-Defamation League ("ADL"). In a letter to the Board dated January 6, 2014, the ADL stated in pertinent part:

If you vote to add a cross to the County seal, you send the divisive and exclusive message that you not only endorse religion over non-religion, but also prefer Christianity over all the other diverse faiths within the County. This message is contrary to your legal and moral responsibility to treat all people alike. While a cross may be appropriate on a house of worship, private school or university, it is unsuitable on a government seal that represents a religiously and ethnically diverse county of over 10 million people. It is also important to note the Mission was added to the seal in 2004 without the cross, and it currently reflects the historical influence of missions in California without promoting a single religious view.

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33. An editorial by The Los Angeles Times dated January 3, 2014 also opposed restoration of the cross to the County seal. The editorial stated in pertinent part:

Los Angeles County Supervisors Don Knabe and Michael D. Antonovich are beginning 2014 by reopening the contentious debate over whether there should be a Christian cross on the county seal. Words almost fail, but here's one that comes to mind: Seriously?

Their argument – that the depiction of the mission is "artistically and architecturally inaccurate" because in real life there is now a cross on top of the main building – is laughable. The little image of the mission on the county seal doesn't include bells, either, and San Gabriel's bells are famous.

But of course, this is not about the depiction and it's not about the bells, either. It's about a not-very-subtle attempt by two elected officials who were on the losing end of the 2004 vote to change the county seal to now sneak the primary symbol of Christianity back in.

34. The motion to restore the cross to the County seal passed 3-2, with Supervisors Molina and Yaroslavsky voting against the motion. As the ADL letter states, the presence of the San Gabriel Mission on the 2004 seal represents the historical role of missions in Southern California without promoting or endorsing a particular religion or religious belief. The purpose and effect of the motion was to favor the Christian faith over other religious and non-religious beliefs. A copy of

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the new seal, adopted by the Board on January 7, 2014, is attached to this complaint as Exhibit 3.

- 35. Each of the plaintiffs is a Los Angeles County taxpayer and will see the County seal frequently. Each plaintiff is deeply offended by the inclusion in the County seal of a clearly identifiable religious symbol and each believes that the inclusion was deliberately intended to promote a sectarian purpose of favoring Christianity among all religions practiced in Los Angeles County and disfavor other religious and non-religious beliefs.
- 36. The County seal is prominently displayed throughout the County, including outside County buildings, on County vehicles, on the County letterhead, and numerous other places. The change to the County seal will cost taxpayers thousands of dollars.
- 37. The violations described in the preceding paragraphs are ongoing and will continue until and unless this court grants the relief Plaintiffs seek by this Complaint.

CAUSES OF ACTION

First Cause of Action

Violation of 42 U.S.C § 1983 (Based on the Violation of the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution as incorporated by the Fourteenth Amendment)

- 38. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference the foregoing paragraphs of this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.
- 39. Defendants, who are charged with respecting on equal terms the religious and non-religious beliefs and affiliations of all residents within Los Angeles County, have denied and continue to deny Plaintiffs their right to practice their faith and religious beliefs freely and without disfavor by their government or government officials. Defendants are denying Plaintiffs rights of religious freedom

equality and to government impartiality as guaranteed by the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

- 40. Defendants have threatened to and will implement the addition of the cross to the Seal in violation of Plaintiffs' rights under the First and Fourteenth Amendments.
- 41. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' unlawful conduct, Plaintiffs will further suffer irreparable harm.

Second Cause of Action

Violation of the California Constitution, Article I, § 4

- 42. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference the foregoing paragraphs of this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.
- 43. Defendants, who are charged with non-discrimination against and affording no preference toward any religion or religious beliefs, have denied and continue to deny Plaintiffs their right to practice their faith and religious beliefs freely and without disfavor by their government or government officials. Defendants are denying Plaintiffs rights of religious freedom, equality and to government impartiality as guaranteed by Article I, § 4 of the California Constitution.
- 44. Defendants have threatened to and will implement the addition of the cross to the Seal in violation of Plaintiffs' rights under Article I, § 4 of the California Constitution.
- 45. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' unlawful conduct, Plaintiffs will further suffer irreparable harm.

Third Cause of Action

Violation of the California Constitution, Article XVI, § 5

46. Plaintiffs incorporate by reference the foregoing paragraphs of this Complaint as though fully set forth herein.

- Defendants, who are charged with not providing any aid to a sectarian 47. purpose under Article XVI, § 5 have violated that duty by authorizing the expenditure of County taxpayer funds to alter the County seal for the sole purpose of adding the preeminent symbol of Christianity to that seal.
- Defendants have threatened to and will implement the addition of the 48. cross to the Seal in violation of Plaintiffs' rights under Article XVI, § 5 of the California Constitution.
- As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' unlawful conduct, 49. Plaintiffs will further suffer irreparable harm.

REQUEST FOR RELIEF

Plaintiffs request relief as follows:

- An injunction prohibiting the Board, its officers, agents, and employees Α. from implementing and displaying the newly adopted official seal containing the cross.
- A declaration that the Board's action to restore a cross to the official B. seal of the County of Los Angeles is unconstitutional under the federal and California Constitutions, as violating Plaintiffs' rights under the First and Fourteenth Amendments under the United States Constitution, and Article I, § 4 and Article XVI, § 5 of the California Constitution.
 - Costs of suit pursuant to 28 U.S.C § 1920 and 42 U.S. § 1988.

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1	D. Attorneys fees pursuant to 42 U.S.C § 1988 and California Code of		
2	Civil Procedure § 1021.5 and any other appropriate statutory basis.		
3	E. Such other relief as the Court deems just and proper.		
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5	DATED:	February <u>5</u> , 2014	Respectfully submitted,
6			CALDWELL LESLIE & PROCTOR, PC
7			LINDA M. BURROW ANDREW ESBENSHADE
8			JEFFREY M. CHEMERINSKY
9			ACLU FOUNDATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
10			MARK D. ROSENBAUM PETER ELIAS ERG
11			
12			By Mark Mserban
13			MARK D. ROSENBAUM Attorneys for Plaintiffs
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Exhibit 1



Seal of the County of Los Angeles, Adopted March 1, 1957

Exhibit 2



Seal of the County of Los Angeles, Adopted September 14, 2004

Exhibit 3



Seal of the County of Los Angeles, Adopted January 7, 2014