GALLOWAY – The only thing missing was sex.

Of the three things we’re never supposed to discuss, there was an ample mix of politics and religion at the Tuesday, Nov. 13 Township Council meeting at the Municipal Complex off Jimmie Leeds Road.

Council meetings have featured invocations by area clergy since early in Tom Bassford’s tenure as mayor.

The practice stopped briefly around four years ago and was reinstated with an expanded program ensuring that all religious groups would be represented and the invocations would be non-denominational.

But the invocations ended this summer and were replaced with moments of silence.

“The initial intent – in concept it was a very good idea,” Township Manager Arch Liston said at Tuesday’s meeting.

He blamed the clergy for the problem.

“We asked them to make it non-denominational,” he said. “They didn’t.”

He said there have been court rulings against prayer at public meetings.

“We don’t want lawsuits,” he said.

Resident Tom Mitchell who generally comments on fiscal matters, raised the question during the public portion of the meeting.

“I’m not that religious, but I come to the meetings and I like to hear the ministers,” Mitchell said “They’re part of the community, and I feel better when they’re here. I like to hear the different points of view. It helps me be a better person.”

Liston said the speakers didn’t do as they were asked to.

“We were asking them to make it non-denominational,” Liston said. “But the clergy went against our wishes and made it very denominational.”

Mayor Don Purdy, who calls for the moment of silence at meetings, said he likes the separation of church and state. Purdy recommends who to think of during the lull.

“It doesn’t have to be me,” the mayor said. “Others on council can give the moment of silence. I enjoy the way it’s structured right now. We all pray in our own ways.”

Councilman Brian Tyrrell, who has a PhD, said “it’s very important to have judges who don’t misinterpret the law.”

Township Solicitor Michael J. Fitzgerald said “bad jurisprudence” has led to a situation where a municipality losing a lawsuit can cause it to have to pay both for its defense and the other party’s legal fees as well.

Resident Anna Jezycki said that if a member of council is opposed to hearing a prayer, he or she can be excused.

“Everyone knew how the meetings ran,” Jezycki said. “Why run for council?”

She told council members. “Don’t for the sake of one person go against the people of this township.”

Bassford, who is in his second term on council, said he isn’t afraid of a lawsuit – which might typically come from the ACLU.

“The ACLU is an abomination,” Bassford said. “If the ACLU sues us, we can discuss the situation and drop the prayer if need be. It won’t cost us if we agree to stop. Personally I’d like to see it continue.”

Bassford also criticized the way the invocations ended.

“There was no vote. It just happened,” he said. “Once in a while we had some people deviate from what they were supposed to do, but nothing major. Congress starts each session with a prayer. They can do it and we can’t? There’s something wrong with this picture.”

Councilman John Mooney blamed the problem on judicial activism.

“Social progressives are driving public policy and religious beliefs are sitting in the back of the bus,” Mooney said. “Until the courts retreat from being the second legislative branch they’ve become, I don’t see much hope there.”

A resolution detailing the procedure for offering various religious organizations the opportunity to speak was passed in 2011 while Keith Hartman was mayor. No resolution has been brought forward to end the policy.