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2024 | Volume 3

The court said the First Amendment requires civil courts to “stay out” of employment disputes involving ministers.

## Federal Court Protects Church School’s Right to Hire Faith-based Teachers

The Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in North Carolina has declared the Catholic Church may ask its school teachers to uphold the Catholic faith. In *Billard v. Diocese of Charlotte*, a former substitute teacher had sued the school and the diocese after they didn't ask him to return. He had previously entered into a same-sex marriage and then posted about it on Facebook. The Fourth Circuit federal court ruled that the diocese has the right to hire teachers who uphold their faith, and pass that belief system on to children, which in effect qualifies them as ministers.

The teacher who filed suit, Lonnie Ballard, had been an English and drama teacher at Charlotte Catholic High School. On retirement, he returned to the school as a substitute teacher. He had been trained in the school's religious mission, and had signed a contract to uphold its teachings. After his same-sex civil union, the school stopped calling him to be a sub.

The Charlotte diocese has been active in North Carolina for more than 50 years, operating 20 schools. Though it also hires non-Catholic teachers, all teachers are asked to uphold the Catholic faith in both their speech and actions.

“The court's decision to bar the plaintiff from pursuing his discrimination claim was an appropriate one,” notes Amireh Al-Haddad, Southern Union director of public affairs and religious liberty. “Churches and other religious employers are protected by the ministerial exemption. In any other situation, the complaint would have been allowed to proceed. The ministerial exemption gives the religious school the right to decide who it hires and fires regarding teaching staff. Teachers are considered ministers in religious schools, as the Fourth Circuit court affirmed. The exemption is an important part of maintaining the integrity of the belief system in our religious organizations.”



# Minnesota Senate Unanimously Amends Bill to Secure Religious Liberties

The state Senate of Minnesota, after weeks of negotiation, successfully amended the 2024 Minnesota Human Rights bill, reinstating religious liberty protections. The previous protections had been removed by another Minnesota law, but this amendment restores them, and both bill and amendment were voted in with unanimous support.

Restored is a statutory framework for religious exemptions that will ensure the Human Rights Bill is in agreement with both the U.S. and Minnesota constitutions.

More than 15 religious organizations, including Catholics, Evangelical Christians,

Jews, and Muslims, publicly expressed support of the restoration.

"This clarification restores religious liberties in Minnesota and provides important protections to our religious organizations," said Senator Jordan Rasmusson. "With the passage of this legislation, we are upholding the right of our religious institutions to make decisions consistent with their faith.... [It] reinstates the protections for religious organizations that all Minnesotans expect to have. It secures into Minnesota law fundamental rights that every American is afforded under the Constitution."

**This amendment restores previously removed religious exemptions in Minnesota law.**

• *In Apache Stronghold v. United States, a federal appeals court has refused to protect an ancient Native American sacred site which is scheduled for destruction via a foreign-owned mining company. However, the Apache Stronghold intends to ask the U.S. Supreme Court to hear their case. This is an update of an ongoing case reported here.*

• *In another updated case, the Jewish families and schools — fighting a California law which excludes religious schools from special education funding for children with disabilities — took their case, Loffman v. California Department of Education, to the Ninth Circuit. This is not concerning general funding of parochial schools, but of allowing state funds for disabled children to follow those children to the schools of their choice. A decision will likely come in a few months.*

• *At the 18th annual Religious Liberty Dinner by the International Religious Liberty Association, North American Religious Liberty Association, Liberty magazine, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, law professor Thomas Berg was recognized with a Religious Freedom Scholar Award for his contributions to scholarship and advocacy.*

## NEWS OF THE WORLD

# Geneva Refuses to Fund Papal Barracks, President Contradicts

The canton of Geneva determined in February that it will not contribute to the funding of the new Swiss Guard barracks at the Vatican. In the name of secularism, the Grand Council refused to contribute financially to the project. However, in May, Viola Amherd, rotating Swiss president for 2024, said she has assured the pope that Switzerland will support reconstruction of the barracks and recruit-

ment of new Swiss Guards.

The original bill called for a subsidy of the equivalent of approximately \$546,000 for the renovation. It was amended to less than \$55,000, but was still rejected. "The sum is not the real issue in this text," said Green Party parliamentarian Pierre Eckert, who pointed out that the religious neutrality of the State of Geneva did not allow it to subsidize a religious activity.

Additionally, the United Nations has promised financial support, even though the barracks are tied to a religious denomination.

Though provided by Switzerland, recruits to the Papal Swiss Guard have church-based requirements which preclude secularism. Besides being unmarried, male, Swiss, between 19 and 30 in age, and at least 5'7" tall, they must also be practicing Catholics..

# Ten Commandments in Every Classroom Pushed in Louisiana

Louisiana is poised to become the first state in the nation to require the posting of the Ten Commandments in every classroom from kindergarten to university. The state house of representatives passed HB71, which requires this in every public classroom, by a 79-16 vote.

The bill states, "The nature of the display shall be determined by each governing authority with a minimum requirement that the Ten Commandments shall be displayed on a poster or framed document that is at least 11 inches by 14 inches. The text of the Ten Com-

mandments shall be the central focus of the poster or framed document and shall be printed in a large, easily readable font."

Though these are educational rather than faith-based institutions, the bill permits, but does not require, public schools to also display the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, and the Northwest Ordinance along with the Ten Commandments.

Republican state Rep. Dodie Horton believes the Ten Commandments are rooted in legal history. She

said her bill would place a "moral code" in the classroom, and she is not concerned about opponents who say that a state requirement for religious text in all classrooms would violate the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution.

The American Civil Liberties Union, American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Freedom from Religion Foundation have issued a statement of deep concern about HB71.

The bill now goes to the governor for his signature.

- *An internationally recognized fighter for religious liberty in Vietnam has died at age 84. Nguyen Quang Trung fought for 30 years to have the Mennonite church recognized and registered for legal worship. The pastor and two-time president of the Vietnam Mennonite Church helped his church grow even through the Vietnam War, and finally received permission to meet again in Ho Chi Minh City in 2006.*

- *Mahmoud v. McKnight was about a challenge to a Maryland school board refusing to allow parents to opt their kids out of reading LGBTQ inclusive books. A federal district court denied their injunction, and in May the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that decision. They said that not allowing an opt-out does not compel parents or children to change their religious beliefs or conduct.*

- *The 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals, in Brandon v. Royce, has reversed the earlier dismissal of a Muslim Sing Sing prison inmate's complaint. It was regarding a special meal which was not served to him in his prison cell — because "the presence of outside guests increased the risk that contraband could be hidden in the food" — during the Muslim Eid al-Adha religious holiday.*

# LIBERTY

Your magazines are in the mail!

We want to extend a big thank you to each church officer and member who gave so generously of talents, time, and offerings during this last religious liberty offering season.

*Liberty* Magazine subscriptions have been submitted, and the first copy starts with the May/June issue. If you subscribed, or your church members subscribed, you should receive your first copy by the end of June.

If you need to check your subscriptions, we can do that for you easily. Just contact us with information below.

**Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. (EDT)**

**Contact: Call 770-408-1800.**

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## Pastors Must Minister to All Across Political Divide

*The following is excerpted from Liberty Magazine.*

Pressure is building for pastors in America to be overtly political. For many Christians the 2020 presidential election was not only a fierce political showdown but also a deeply spiritual struggle.

As a pastor, I sensed the moral conviction that gripped my church members when one Bible teacher told me, "There's no way a Christian can vote for Biden." Weeks later another

church leader urged with equal certainty that no true Christian could possibly vote for Trump. Both people expressed deeply held Christian values to support their conclusions. Which one was right? Or were both right? Or were both wrong?

Faithful Christians must examine and follow the example of Jesus. Never was there a pastor who was more committed to reaching both sides of a politically polarized world than Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus has shown the way

forward for believers and leaders in today's hyper-partisan political climate. Churches must develop the ability to rise above the fray: 1) Make room on your team for disciples who are political outsiders; 2) Preach Jesus; 3) Avoid favoritism; 4) Strike a tone of authentic love, not inflammatory language.

The year 2024 provides an opportunity for Christians to live by the power of the gospel, showing the world that God can still unite the most unlikely people.

To read  
the entire  
article, link  
via the QR  
code below.

