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**Maryland law could  
now make it illegal  
for the Church to  
expect employees  
to uphold Church  
standards.**



## Adventist Church Sues Maryland Over Right to Hire Within Belief System

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has filed suit against the state of Maryland and officials and members of the Maryland Civil Rights Commission. The Church says that the Maryland Supreme Court's interpretation of the state's fair employment law prevents it and all religious organizations from the ability to hire and fire employees based on their beliefs, and so discriminates against their constitutional right to religious independence.

Last year in a case filed by Catholic Relief Services, the state's Supreme Court said the religious exemption only applies to "claims brought by employees who perform duties that directly further the core mission (or missions) of the religious entity." In *General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists v. Horton*, filed in October, the Church refers to the Catholic case and claims that it violates plaintiffs' rights under the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses, and goes against other 1st and 14th Amendment rights.

"Plaintiffs require all employees to be members in regular standing of the Church — regardless of their job title and responsibilities," the lawsuit says. "This includes employees with traditional religious roles (such as pastors and ministers) and those whose roles may not typically be deemed religious (such as information technology personnel and maintenance workers). But Maryland law now purports to make this religious exercise unlawful."

Further, Church lawyers say that, "Application of (Maryland Fair Employment Practices Act) to Plaintiffs' hiring practices would result in excessive government entanglement with the Church's internal religious decision-making and would violate the First Amendment."

If churches and religious organizations are not allowed to live, teach, hire and fire, and generally govern themselves according to their belief system, then the separation of church and state is threatened.

## NEWS OF THE WORLD

# China Expands Repression, Ukraine Targets Orthodox Church

### China

The Communist Party in China asked the leaders of the country's recognized faiths — Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, Islam, and Taoism — to a seminar in Beijing this past summer. Attendees were told by a member of the Political Bureau Committee that Sinicization, the seminar's theme, "is the only way to actively guide religions to adapt to socialist society."

Sinicization is purportedly a plan to make religion authentically Chinese, but is, effectively, a plan to secularize religion and make all religious practice and belief conform to government dogma and party authority.

Arrests and detention of pastors, elders, deacons, and other church leaders has risen since that time.

### Ukraine

A new law in Ukraine has banned the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and its affiliates, including the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). Signed into law in August, it identifies the ROC as a part of the Russian state and a partner to war crimes committed by Russia. The law will also liquidate affiliated Ukrainian organizations, including the UOC.

The Russian constitution recognizes the contribution of Orthodox Christianity to Russia's history, and the ROC has taken an official stance against Ukraine. The UOC declared independence from the ROC, but did not formalize the process under canon law, and risks being seen as an agent of the Kremlin. Several senior clergy have left Ukraine for Russia since the war began.


**Adventists  
have long  
recognized  
the dangers  
of church and  
state holding  
hands, as  
evidenced in  
ROC and UOC.**

• An Indiana federal district court has determined that teaching evolution does not violate the Establishment Clause, stating that it "is not a religion and that teaching evolution does not violate the Establishment Clause." The plaintiffs had opined that evolution embodies "all the tenets of atheistic religious belief."

• In Iowa, an administrative law judge held that the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act protects churches from taxpayer suits which challenge their property tax exemption in an attempt to force them into litigation.

• The U.S. Supreme Court decided against hearing a case about Michigan's constitutional ban on taxpayer funding for private schools. Petitioners claim the ban violates the Equal Protection Clause by causing a disadvantage for religious families who wish to lobby for funding of religious schools. Respondents say the ban is neutral and doesn't target religion.

• The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has found that the U.S. is better at condemning religious freedom violations abroad than in promoting changes via bilateral relationships and more clear and consistent sanctions and justifications.



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**JANUARY 11, 2025**

# Washington Agency Fails to Accommodate Muslim Applicant

The EEOC has filed suit under Title VII against Logic Staffing, a Washington state-based staffing and recruiting agency. They are charged with religious discrimination and retaliation against a Muslim job applicant.

The applicant applied online and was invited to interview for an opening. However, mid-interview the applicant requested a mid-day break to attend Friday prayer. The supervisor ended the interview and said he was not hired because of his need to attend Friday prayer.

"Title VII requires employers, employment agencies, and unions to make adjustments to the workplace environment to allow applicants and employees to practice their faith, absent undue hardship," said Elizabeth Cannon, director of the EEOC's Seattle Field Office. "Instead of exploring alternatives and contacting its business clients to determine if accommodation was possible, Logic Staffing turned away a promising candidate and violated the law."

**A job was not offered because the applicant requested a short time for prayer.**

# Oklahoma in Conflict Over Bible

As previously reported in *Waymarks*, the Oklahoma state superintendent of public instruction issued a memo requiring the incorporation of the Bible into all public school curriculum. This month a request to purchase 55,000 Bibles for Oklahoma classrooms was issued.

Specifications issued by the superintendent were met only by two Bibles. One is the Lee Greenwood's God Bless the U.S.A. Bible, endorsed by former President Donald Trump and commonly referred to as the Trump Bible. These Bibles are \$60 each online, with Trump receiving endorsement fees. Additionally, the We The People Bible, endorsed by Donald Trump Jr., fit the specifications.

The state was met with accusations of a pro-Trump bias, and said it is shifting requirements for which Bibles will be put in classrooms.

However, many school districts continue to refuse the

mandate. Most recently, a group of parents and teachers in Oklahoma have filed suit against the requirement.

This story will be evolving, and *Waymarks* will continue to monitor and report.

# Past CUNY Employee Claims Discrimination

A terminated employee of City University of New York (CUNY) is suing on the basis of religious discrimination after she converted to Christianity and was denied accommodation.

Teona Pagan's job overseeing fellowships involved recruiting for and promoting LGBT "rights and causes." After her conversion, she

decided she could not fulfill this part of her job — which was less than 10% of her entire job — and asked for accommodation, but eventually her contract was not renewed as she was found to be an "undue burden on the office."

The EEOC has refused to take up her suit, so she is filing on her own.

**Are you having a work accommodation issue?**

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# South Carolina Supreme Court Finds Tax-funded Vouchers for Private School Unconstitutional

Using taxpayer dollars to fund private school tuition and fees as part of its new K-12 voucher program, the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF), has been found to be unconstitutional by the South Carolina Supreme Court in a 3-2 decision.

"No money shall be paid from public funds nor shall the credit of the State or any of its political subdivisions be used for the direct benefit of any religious or other

private educational institution," is quoted from the state's constitution.

The ESTF, which currently has enrolled close to 3,000 students, provides up to \$6,000 for each eligible student. Even though payment of tuition has been found to be unconstitutional, though, the education savings account funds are still eligible to be used for tutoring, certain technology, educational services for students with disabilities, and transporta-

tion fees, according to the state's Department of Education.

Though widely supported by state Governor Henry McMaster, who is requesting reconsideration by the South Carolina Supreme Court, allowing tax dollars to go to private schools would then raise the question of whether private religious schools should accept the funds — along with any possible future strictures which accompany them.

**"...public funds are confined for public education," noted SC Education Association president.**