

First Liberty Institute: Attacks on Religious Liberty Have Doubled Since 2012

This week, the First Liberty Institute, formerly known as Liberty Institute, led by religious liberty defender Kelly Shackelford, released its annual report on the hostility to religion in America.

The report, titled “Undeniable: The Survey of Hostility to Religion in America,” offers nearly 350 pages of recent reported attacks on religious liberty in the U.S. with four or five examples per page. It also found that attacks on religious liberty have skyrocketed in the past three years.

“Hostility to religion in America is rising like floodwaters, as proven by the increased numbers of cases and attacks documented in this report,” Shackelford wrote in the report’s introduction. “This flood is engulfing ordinary citizens who simply try to live normal lives according to their faith and conscience. It is eroding the bedrock on which stand vital American institutions such as government, education, the military, business, houses of worship and charity. It has the potential to wash away the ground that supports our other rights, including freedom of speech, press, assembly and government by consent of the people.”

First Liberty Institute has been documenting assaults on religious liberty since 2012. In the first edition of the Texas-based religious liberty organization’s report, there were about 600 reported cases; this year, the number has more than doubled.

“The flood is a national problem,” Shackelford wrote. “Every American should share in the concern for at least three reasons:

“First, individuals and families are being hurt. The attacks you will read about in these pages are sweeping away small businesses, careers and ministries. Behind the legalities are tears, anguish and the denial of basic human tolerance, compassion and common decency. It’s time for a national rejection of politically correct cruelty based on discrimination against traditional American forms of faith.

“Second, the attacks injure us all. The animus toward religion springs from a relatively small but powerful sector of society composed of influential people and organizations who consider active faith as irrelevant at best, and dangerous to essential social progress at worst. As a result of such hostility to religion:

- “Good employees are being unlawfully fired, and productive businesses recklessly harmed;
- “Valuable public servants are being aggressively driven from their fields;
- “Ministries, churches and chaplains are being threatened or restricted from fulfilling their spiritual callings.

“The flood is curtailing help for students, the elderly, the sick, the poor, orphans, addicts and the homeless. It is even endangering efforts to show compassion and comfort to current and former members of our military, jeopardizing morale and thus our national security. ...

“Third, freedom of religion is foundational to all other freedoms. From the beginning of the colonies and continuing until today, immigrants came to America for religious freedom. Freedom of religious conscience is part of a person’s core identity and embedded in America’s cultural DNA. Further, religious freedom is in the First Amendment because all other freedoms rest upon it. Without the concept of a higher authority to make government accountable to unchanging principles of justice, all other freedoms are at risk of being violated, redefined or revoked by government.”

Shackelford said the good news is that the vast majority of the hostility to religion contained in First Liberty's survey is unlawful. He said those attacks only succeed because of "its own bluff" and victims' passivity.

"Hostility to religion can be defeated in the legal system—but only if challenged by Americans like you," he added. "When you stand up, First Liberty Institute and your fellow Americans will be standing with you offering legal assistance, research and decisive help."