

‘Get Your Bibles Out,’ Military Tells Gideons Volunteers

For more than a decade, new military recruits at the Maxwell Air Force Base Gunter Annex in Alabama have received a Bible from Gideons International volunteers. But that tradition has come to an end after volunteers said they were told by the military that they would no longer be allowed to personally distribute the pocket-sized Bibles to recruits.

“They kicked us out,” Gideon’s volunteer Michael Fredenburg told me in a telephone interview from his home in Montgomery, Ala. “They told us, ‘Get your Bibles out.’”

Gaylan Johnson is a public affairs officer for the Military Entrance Processing Command (MEPCS). He told me the Gideons’ side of the story is “not strictly true.”

“They can place their literature within our facility, but they are not allowed to stand there and talk with applicants or hand them [the Bibles] out,” he told me.

Fredenburg said his father started the tradition of giving Bibles to new military recruits at the Military Entrance Processing Command center more than 10 years ago. He assumed leadership of the group when his father died last July.

For years the Gideons have distributed Bibles to new recruits four days a week. After they finished their paperwork, the recruits would pass by Gideon volunteers, who shook their hands and offered them a pocket-sized Bible.

The Gideon volunteers had military identification cards and had been allowed to store Bibles on the base, Fredenburg said.

“It worked beautifully,” he said.

But that changed last week, when Fredenburg said a sergeant informed the Gideons that the Bible distribution program was about to come to a end.

"I tried to get ahold of the colonel, but he would not return my call," Fredenburg said.

So Fredenburg instructed the volunteers to continue distributing the Bibles until they received official orders. Those orders came on Wednesday. The Gideons would no longer be allowed to give the recruits God's Word, he said.

"I contacted one of my guys and asked him to get the Bibles out," Fredenburg told me. "He went over and got all the Bibles—and we're out."

Just like that. The Gideons were never told why.

Johnson said there is a command-wide policy regulating any organization that's not a member of the federal government. Those organizations are referred to as non-federal entities.

"The policy says non-federal entities shall not be permitted to post or station a member within the premises of any MEPCS, including outdoor areas under the exclusive control of the MEPCS for purposes of distributing literature," he said.

Johnson said the Gideons are allowed to have a literature display rack, which they are welcome to replenish on a recurring basis.

"They were informed they couldn't stand within the premises anymore and hand them out," Johnson said. "The Bibles are on a table. Applicants at their own free will can pick one up if they like."

Word of the ouster of the internationally known Christian community spread like wildfire among Fredenburg and his friends. All were in a state of disbelief.

“They were happy my dad wasn’t alive to see it,” Fredenburg said. “If he would’ve seen that happen, it probably would’ve killed him.”

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