

Ohio School District Folds, Allows Teacher to Observe Extra Religious Holy Days

Salem City School District in Ohio granted a longtime teacher the ability to observe additional holy days last week, recognizing her rights under the First Amendment.

Shawnae Carlisle, who has taught at the district for 15 years, is a member of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association – a small coalition of churches that marks Old Testament holidays, which Christian denominations have historically not done.

But Carlisle has been requesting these days off from work for years without issue – until the district rejected her request for time off for the Feast of Tabernacles in October.

First Liberty, which represented Carlisle, said that district officials were “giving arbitrary and inconsistent reasons for why she could not attend the Feast of Tabernacles.”

Carlisle took the days off anyway – and was sanctioned as a result.

“Ms. Carlisle was unwilling to jeopardize her faith and continued to secure substitute coverage so she could observe her religious practice,” First Liberty added.

“The school subsequently suspended her without pay for five days.”



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The legal nonprofit announced on March 24 that Salem City School District had agreed to grant her accommodation, which permits her to “take unpaid time off to observe various

religious holy days in accordance with her faith.”

The organization had previously sent the district a demand letter asking that they reverse course.

“We are grateful that after receiving our letter about Ms. Carlisle’s religious liberty rights, the Salem City School District reversed its prior suspension of Ms. Carlisle for observing religious holy days and instead agreed to accommodate her religious observances going forward,” Cliff Martin, senior counsel at First Liberty, said in a statement.

After observing religious holy days for 14 years without incident, elementary school teacher Shawnae Carlisle was punished with a 5-day unpaid suspension. We stepped in, and the school reversed course!

– First Liberty Institute (@firstliberty_) March 26, 2026

“Salem City School District’s actions demonstrate how all school districts can and should respect their religious employees.”

Ashbrook Byrne Kresge Flowers LLC assisted with the legal defense of Carlisle.

Ben Flowers, an attorney at the firm, said that “both teaching and faith are important to Ms. Carlisle.”

He expressed gratitude that the situation appears to have been resolved.

“No one should be forced to violate their religious beliefs in order to keep their job, and we are glad that with this new religious accommodation, she will not have to choose between the two.”

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