

Pizza Parlor Church Discount Gives Atheists Indigestion

Steven Rose loves Jesus and pepperoni pizza.

But when the Searcy, Arkansas, restaurateur decided to mix church and cheese, it gave a group of out-of-town atheists a bad case of indigestion.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) is threatening to sue Rose after he offered a discount to customers who bring in a church bulletin. They said Bailey's Pizza is violating the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

"The law requires places of public accommodation to offer their services to customers without regard to race, color, religion or national origin," FFRF spokesperson Elizabeth Cavell told television station KTHV.

Rose, who opened the pizza parlor in July, told me there's nothing nefarious about the church-bulletin discount.

"It was a straight-up marketing tool to give a discount to people I love and care about—and have them come in and have lunch with me," he said. "I thought it was a sweet idea. I didn't say you had to go to church to get it. Go get a bulletin from your neighbor and come in and have a pizza."

The trouble started a few weeks ago when someone posted a Facebook photo of the sign promoting the discount.

"It was from a guy whose Facebook name is 'Bong Hits for Jesus,'" Steven told me. "It said, 'good luck with the discrimination lawsuit.'"

Rose said he didn't consider the post to be a credible threat—seeing how the Facebook user's name is "Bong Hits for Jesus."

Two weeks later, he received the letter from the Wisconsin-based atheist group. They said that if he did not stop offering a church discount, they would “take appropriate steps.”

“I’m just selling pizzas,” Steven told me. “I love my Lord, and you see it expressed all over my building—but I’m just selling pizzas.”

And he’s not kidding. The local television station reports that customers are allowed to write Bible verses on the walls. And in the center is a message from the owners: “God is the center of our lives, so our scripture wall is the center of Bailey’s Pizza.”

“To me, if making a pepperoni pizza furthers the kingdom—well I’m excited about that,” he said.

But just because Rose is a Christian business owner doesn’t mean he has a problem with nonbelievers.

“They’re coming at us and saying we’re discriminating,” he said. “I don’t hate anybody.”

The FFRF has a history of targeting and bullying Christian business owners. Earlier this month, a North Carolina diner dropped a discount for customers who prayed before their meal.

“We are no longer issuing the 15% praying in public discount,” read a sign posted at Mary’s Gourmet Diner. “It is illegal and we are being threatened by lawsuit. We apologize to our community for any offense this discount has incurred.”

Why must atheist groups like FFRF be so ill-tempered?

So is it really unconstitutional for restaurants to provide religious-themed discounts? Not at all, says Hiram Sasser, director of litigation for Liberty Institute.

“In fact, if what FFRF is saying were true, restaurants and other businesses would be precluded from giving veterans and

military members discounts because that would technically be discriminating based on veteran status,” Sasser tells me. “Is that what FFRF wants? Give me a break!”

The folks at Bailey’s Pizza are still not sure why the Wisconsin atheists are targeting their restaurant.

“They may have something against my pizza,” Rose said.

Or maybe they’re upset because Bailey’s Pizza won’t deliver to Wisconsin. Who knows?

Whatever the reason, Rose is still contemplating what to do next. He fears a legal battle would be costly—and he’s quick to point out: He’s no Papa John’s.

“It’s just me and my wife running this place,” he said. “I’ve got window units at my house. We’re not rich. We’re just trying to be our own bosses and be an American success story.”

Steven tells me it’s really sad that the FFRF is spending its money to attack his restaurant.

“The 75 cents that somebody saves when they bring in a church bulletin—is that really what they need to be spending their money on?” he asked. “How about spending that money helping the homeless?”

For now, the church discount will remain at Bailey’s Pizza.

“As for me and my house, we’ll serve the Lord,” he told me.

And he will also keep serving their 32 varieties of pies—from Frito chili to baked potato pizza.

“We pride ourselves in crazy pies,” he said. “But I’m old school. I eat the pepperoni—that’s all I need.”

You really can’t go wrong with a large pepperoni. Just be sure to hold the anchovies—and the atheists.

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