

This Is More Than Just Another Assault Against Christians

There is growing outrage among sailors and religious-liberty advocates over a directive that calls for the removal of Bibles from lodges and hotels run on U.S. Navy bases. The directive comes after an atheist group filed a formal complaint earlier this year over the placement of Bibles in the rooms.

“The current direction is to remove all religious material from Navy Lodge guest rooms,” read an email to a Navy chaplain from The Navy Exchange Service Command (NEXCOM). “For those Navy Lodges with religious materials currently in guest rooms, the Navy Lodge General Manager will contact the Installation Chaplain’s office who will provide guidance on the removal procedure disposition of these materials.”

The American Family Association received an exclusive copy of a similar directive from NEXCOM, the organization that manages the lodges.

“The Navy Lodge General Manager should advise the Installation Commanding Officer of our intention to work through the chaplain’s office to determine what installation policy is and the method to remove religious material currently in the guest rooms,” read a directive approved by Michael Bockelman, the vice president of NEXCOM and director of the Navy Lodge Program.

In other words, they have to figure out a way to dispose of God’s Word.

I contacted NEXCOM spokesperson Kathleen Martin hoping to get the inside scoop. Yes or no: Are Bibles being removed from

Navy-run lodges? Martin dodged my question and, to be quite frank, gave me the runaround. She refused, on numerous occasions, to explain the whereabouts of the lodge Bibles.

“Lodge managers are coordinating with base chaplains regarding the disposition of all religious material,” she said.

Martin said the directive will impact about 40 Navy lodges around the world.

“We looked at our policy—and realized there wasn’t a consistent policy regarding Navy lodges,” she told me. “We decided we needed to have some consistency and be consistent with the Navy.”

I figured I would try one more time. Yes or no: Will the Navy allow Bibles to be placed in Navy lodges? Martin refused to answer the question.

The order was hailed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The FFRF had filed a complaint with the military—claiming the presence of the Bible “amounts to a government endorsement of that religious text.”

“FFRF is pleased to learn that NEXCOM has taken seriously its constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion as a representative of our federal government,” FFRF Sam Grover told me. “By removing Bibles from Navy-run lodges, the Navy has taken a step to ensure that it is not sending the impermissible message that Christians are favored over guests with other religious beliefs or over those guests with no religion.”

The Bibles had been placed in the rooms, free of charge, by Gideons International.

An active-duty service member contacted me and alerted me that the Bibles were being taken out of hotel rooms, and a lodge housekeeper told American Family Association the same thing.

"They told us to put them in boxes where they would be taken to a donation center somewhere," the housekeeper told AFA.

The Navy even has a plan in the event, heaven forbid, a guest leaves behind their Bible.

"All religious materials left by a Navy Lodge guest, in the future, will be dealt with following established procedures for lost and found property," the directive states.

FFRF said they were alerted to the presence of Bibles in rooms by "two concerned service members."

"One complainant noted that he 'never saw a Book of Mormon or Quran' in any Navy-run lodge," read an FFRF letter to the Navy.

Mikey Weinstein, president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, told me he was delighted to hear of the Navy's directive. His organization has been trying for more than seven years to "cleanse" military hotel rooms of the Good Book.

"We are happy to see the military doing that," Weinstein said. "For years we've been telling them those Bibles are a violation of the Establishment Clause."

Ron Crews, executive director of the Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty, blasted the Navy for removing the Bibles.

"This is just one more assault by military leaders against anything Christian," Crews told me. "It's getting tiresome to see senior military leaders cave in to those who appear to be offended by Christians, by Christian symbols, and now by the Bible itself."

Crews said there's nothing wrong with allowing the Gideons to place Bibles in Navy lodges—at no cost to the Navy.

"Our military service men and women have every right to look

at literature in hotel rooms—including the Scriptures,” he said.

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