

Threatened Pastor Wins Right to Hand Out Bibles During Harley-Davidson Festival

The city of Greenfield, Wis., agreed Friday to allow a pastor to continue distributing Bibles on public streets at a Harley-Davidson festival after receiving a letter from Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF). Police had threatened the pastor with arrest for peacefully handing out the Bibles to willing passersby at the festival.

“No one should be threatened with arrest simply because they choose to exercise their **First Amendment** freedoms in a public place,” says ADF legal counsel Jon Scruggs. “We commend the city for promptly agreeing to respect the constitutionally protected right of this pastor and all Americans to peacefully distribute faith-based literature.”

On Aug. 28, David Murray went to the House of Harley-Davidson on West Layton Avenue to express his religious faith and distribute Bibles during the Harley-Davidson festival, which is free and open to the public. Security officers and Greenfield police officers ordered Murray to stop expressing his beliefs and to move to the adjacent sidewalk behind the festival vendors, an area no one accesses.

Murray’s friend Dan Lawrence then tried to convince a police captain to allow him and Murray to distribute Bibles in the festival area. But the captain reiterated that neither man was allowed to distribute Bibles on the street inside the festival.

As the ADF letter explains, “Lawrence desires to convey his religious beliefs through activities protected by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. According to the Supreme Court, oral and written dissemination of religious

viewpoints are entitled to the utmost constitutional protection.”

The letter also explains that “expression in a traditional public forum deserves the highest level of protection, and any infringement of speech activity there must overcome great scrutiny.”

Greenfield’s police chief wrote in an email to ADF on Friday that “personnel have been advised to allow your client’s activity within the public streets, sidewalks and right of way.”

“The government should not harass and threaten citizens for exercising their constitutionally protected freedoms in public,” adds senior counsel Kevin Theriot. “The city of Greenfield has rightly understood this, and we will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that this pastor’s freedom to share his faith is respected. The First Amendment specifically protects every American’s freedom of speech and religious expression.”