

UNC Wants Christian Club to Let Unbelievers Lead

The University of North Carolina-Greensboro (UNCG) is saying a **Christian student club** isn't religious—and because it's not religious, the “Make Up Your Own Mind” club must allow students from other religious and belief systems to become members and leaders in order to get formal group recognition from the university.

That move led to a federal lawsuit against UNCG. Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) attorneys representing the club filed suit on Wednesday.

“Saying that a **Christian club** isn't religious is flatly absurd, especially when the university has granted its belief-based exception to numerous other clubs,” says ADF Legal Counsel Jeremy Tedesco. “The First Amendment forbids the government from determining what is and what is not ‘religious,’ yet the university is doing exactly this by telling a Christian group that it is not religious. The Constitution protects the right of all student groups to employ belief-based criteria in selecting their members and leaders.”

UNC-Greensboro's nondiscrimination policy contains an exemption for student groups that select their members based on a shared set of beliefs. The exemption states, “Student groups that select their members on the basis of commitment to a set of beliefs (e.g., religious or political beliefs) may limit membership and participation in the group to students who, upon individual inquiry, affirm that they support the group's goals and agree with its beliefs.”

The “Make Up Your Own Mind” club at UNC-Greensboro applied for recognition under this exemption, but university officials

denied the request, saying that the club is not **religious** even though the club has a clear **religious mission** and purpose and requires its members and leaders to agree with its statement of faith and beliefs about the value of innocent human life.

The university argued that the club is “not affiliated with a church but rather a local nonprofit organization. However, being affiliated with a church is not a requirement for qualifying as a religious organization. In addition, the university recognizes many other religious organizations that are not affiliated with a church.

After the university thwarted the club’s efforts to obtain recognition for months, the club resubmitted its request. The club even pointed out the many statements in its constitution showing that it is a religious group. Despite this, the university failed to act on the new request, prompting the club to file suit in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina.