

UPDATE: Supreme Court Unanimously Supports Christian Postal Worker's Right to Observe the Sabbath

The U.S. Supreme Court has unanimously ruled in favor of Gerald Groff, a Christian mail carrier from Pennsylvania, in a significant religious liberty case concerning accommodations for faith-based requests in the workplace.

Groff sought clarification on whether the U.S. Postal Service could require him to deliver packages on Sundays, which he observes as the Sabbath.

The Supreme Court's decision overturns a 1977 precedent that established the "reasonably accommodate" test for employers regarding religious beliefs and practices.

The new ruling tightens the "undue hardship" standard, making it potentially easier for employees to secure religious accommodations at work. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandates employers to accommodate employees' religious practices unless it poses an "undue hardship" on the business.

Groff's attorney argued that the court should discard the "de minimus" test, which has been used by lower courts to deny religious accommodations, and instead rely on the plain language of Title VII. They suggested defining "undue burden" similarly to other federal laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. The argument highlighted the inconsistency of allowing accommodations for disabilities but not for religious practices.

The U.S. Solicitor General, Elizabeth Prelogar, opposed overturning the 1977 precedent, expressing concerns about the

potential ramifications on established case law. However, the Supreme Court decided that the de minimus test had sometimes led to the denial of even minor religious accommodations, making it difficult for individuals of minority faiths to find employment.

“We hold that showing ‘more than a de minimus cost,’ as that phrase is used in common parlance, does not suffice to establish ‘undue hardship’ under Title VII. Hardison cannot be reduced to that one phrase,” Justice Samuel Alito wrote in the court’s opinion.

Groff, who worked as a fill-in mail carrier, faced the challenge of Sunday shifts when the USPS contracted with Amazon for weekend deliveries.

Initially, he managed to transfer to a branch without Sunday deliveries. However, when that branch also began Sunday deliveries, Groff struggled to find replacements for his shifts, resulting in numerous absences. These absences strained the work environment, impacted morale and burdened other carriers with additional Sunday mail duties.

Concerned about potential job termination, Groff resigned in 2019 and filed a federal lawsuit against the Postal Service, claiming that alternative scheduling would have accommodated his religious beliefs.

The Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in May 2022 that further accommodations would create an undue hardship for USPS. However, the Supreme Court vacated the Third Circuit’s judgment, sending the case back for additional proceedings based on its new opinion.

In an op-ed for Fox News Digital, Groff expressed his delight over the Supreme Court’s decision, which reaffirmed the nation’s commitment to equal opportunity and fair treatment in the workplace. He emphasized his gratitude for the support he received from his family, community, co-workers and neighbors.

Groff saw the court's ruling as not only a vindication of his decision to honor the Lord's Day but also a testament to his trust in God.

The Bible reminds believers of the importance of honoring God and seeking His guidance in all aspects of life. In Proverbs 3:5-6, it is written, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." Groff's case serves as a reminder of the significance of upholding religious liberty and seeking accommodations that respect individuals' deeply held beliefs in the workplace. {eo}

James Lasher is Staff Writer for Charisma Media.