

Why Do Gideon Bibles Make Atheists So Angry?

Caving to atheists, this week the University of Wisconsin and Iowa State University needlessly removed Bibles from all university guest rooms after receiving complaints from an atheist group.

But according to Alliance Defending Freedom, a Christian conservative legal group, they didn't need to.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation complained that allowing groups like Gideons International, a Christian organization, to place Bibles in guest rooms violated the First Amendment. The Alliance Defending Freedom letters debunk those claims, explain that the Bibles do not violate the Constitution and encourage the universities to restore the Bibles to the guest rooms rather than surrender to the atheist group's unfounded legal threats and inaccurate demands.

"Public universities, which are the marketplaces of ideas, should understand that the First Amendment does not require them to purge something from campus just because it happens to be religious. Rather, the Constitution requires them to accommodate religion," says litigation staff counsel Travis Barham.

"The Bibles can legitimately stay because their presence in guest rooms is simply a discreet way of accommodating the needs of traveling guests," he says. "They are in no way a government promotion of religion."

The Alliance Defending Freedom letters to the universities state, "In reality, the First Amendment does not require you to remove these Bibles, and by removing them, you may have demonstrated the very viewpoint discrimination and hostility towards religion that the First Amendment prohibits. ... The

Supreme Court and numerous other federal courts have repeatedly condemned efforts to exclude or restrict religious materials and activities as viewpoint or content discrimination, both at universities and elsewhere.”

The letters go on to explain that federal courts give universities great latitude in accommodating religion. The letters also note that “numerous courts across the country have affirmed the Gideons’ right to distribute Bibles in schools, and even more have affirmed private citizens’ right to share religious literature at public schools on equal terms with those promoting non-religious literature.”

“By allowing Bibles to be placed in their guest rooms, these universities were not unconstitutionally promoting religion to guests but were merely serving their guests’ needs and desires,” adds senior legal counsel David Hacker.

“The Freedom From Religion Foundation neglected to mention that no court has ruled that universities who provide these Bibles violate the First Amendment,” Hacker says. “Universities should not allow themselves to be browbeaten into taking unnecessary and potentially unconstitutional actions.”