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EDITOR: Sheila Elwin
religiousliberty@southernunion.com

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Oakwood Academy Fights for Right to Compete With Sabbath Accommodation

The basketball team of Oakwood Adventist Academy (OAA), in Huntsville, AL, competes within the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA). Following an historic winning season, the academy requested Sabbath accommodation as they approached the semifinal game which was scheduled for a Sabbath afternoon, but were denied the right and forfeited the game. They are now asking a federal court to decide this right for the future.

Oakwood had asked the AHSAA to switch the two semi-final games scheduled for the day. The second game was scheduled after sunset, which would have allowed them to compete. The other teams involved agreed to the switch, but AHSAA nevertheless denied the accommodation.

Previously, OAA had been asked to sign a document saying they would forfeit accommodation rights when they joined the association. However, sporting organizations are commonly known

to make scheduling adjustments for religious groups, particularly since minority faiths are impacted most, and the academy assumed they could work with AHSAA if it became necessary.

The Southern Union, South Central Conference, and Union Office of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) have voted to take on this issue. Adventist opinions on competitive sports differ, but PARL has taken the case due to its constitutional issues.

“While we are clearly dealing with an accommodation issue, it is not the traditional type of issue we normally deal with in terms of workplace accommodation,” says Amireh AL-Haddad, PARL director. “There is a constitutional element in this issue involving the forfeit of guaranteed rights of free exercise of religion. At issue here is that the AHSAA required Oakwood to forfeit those rights in order to join the association, a forfeit that no other school was required to make in order to be a member.”

Catholic School Defends Right to Hire/Fire Based on Beliefs

Arguments for a case that will determine whether the government has the right to overturn a Catholic school's rules for selecting its own religious leaders and teachers was recently heard by the Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, in *Starkey v. Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis*.

The Archdiocese did not renew the contract of Lynn Starkey, former co-director of guidance at Roncalli High School, because she entered a same-sex union. This was in violation of her contract and denominational teaching. Her case was thrown out by a federal district court, which determined that the Constitution does not allow the government to force a church to hire someone who rejects their teaching. However, Starkey appealed.

The Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru* confirmed that religious schools have the right to make their own hiring and firing decisions, and upholds their Constitutional right without government interference.

The Archdiocese is being represented by Becket Law. Becket is a nonprofit institute with a mission to protect the free expression of all faiths. Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel, points out that, "If Catholic schools can't ask their teachers and leaders to support Catholic teaching, it undermines the entire mission of the school. We're glad the district court recognized this common-sense principle, and we expect the Seventh Circuit to do the same."

"If Catholic schools can't ask their teachers ... to support Catholic teaching, it undermines [their] entire mission ..."

Police Settle With Muslim Woman in Lawsuit Over Hijab

Ferndale, MI, police settled with Helena Bowe, a Muslim woman, after she accused officers of violating her religious freedom when they told her to remove her hijab for a mug shot. Additionally, the police department will implement new policies following the lawsuit filed by the Council on American Islamic Relations.

Bowe was arrested after being stopped for an ex-

pired license tag. Her tags were not expired, but she did tell police that she had a taser in her purse, and it had no permit. Following arrest, a male police officer ordered her to remove her abaya, which prompted the lawsuit.

"The male guard forced our client to remove her religious covering despite her pleas to not have to remove it, stating that removing it

made her in a state of undress and that was a violation of her sincerely held religious beliefs," said Attorney Amy Doukoure said during a press conference.

Besides a monetary settlement, Ferndale police have now changed their policies to allow Muslim women to continue wearing their hijab during booking photos, and to prohibit cross-gender searches.

• *The Southern Society of Adventist Attorneys will join the North American Division Adventist Attorney Retreat this year, held September 22-25, 2022. The retreat will be held at the Hilton - Los Angeles North, in Glendale, CA. More information on reservations and CLE classes will follow.*

• *Several religious liberty cases still await decision by the Supreme Court of the United States:*

—*Kennedy v. Bremerton School District: The justices will consider whether a public school violated the First Amendment rights of a football coach, Joseph A. Kennedy, who prayed with students after a game on a public football field. The school did not re-hire Kennedy after the prayer controversy.*

—*Carson v. Makin: The issue in this case is whether a state law prohibiting students from using a generally available student-aid program at private schools offering religious teachings violates the First Amendment's Religion and Equal Protection Clauses.*

American Airlines Ranks First in REDI Index Evaluation of 500 Largest American Companies on Faith-friendly Workplaces

American Airlines ranks as the most faith-friendly corporate workplace in a line-up of the 500 largest companies in America. The ranking is shown in the 2022 REDI Index, the Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Index developed by the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation, which evaluates each company's commitment to including religion within its diversity initiatives.

Companies ranking 2nd through 10th are Intel Corporation, Dell Technologies, PayPal, Texas Instruments, Equinix, Target, Tyson

Foods, AIG, and Alphabet/Google. Tying for 11th are American Express, Ford Motor Company, and Intuit.

Among Fortune 500 companies, 202 (40%) in some way mention or illustrate religion on their diversity. And 37 companies (7.4%) publicly report having faith-oriented employee resource groups (ERGs).

The following findings about the Fortune 500's top faith-friendly companies are taken directly from the REDI report:

- Company-sponsored, employee-led, faith-oriented employee resource

groups (ERGs) give religious employees an official voice in the company.

- Companies with such ERGs commonly encourage and support ERG chapters worldwide.

- These ERGs often lead strategic company & community allyship and service initiatives.

- Companies enthusiastically share best faith and work practices with other companies (incl. competitors) through direct consultations, seminars, roundtables, and/or conferences.

- Literacy training on religious DEI is seen as a bene-

fit to a wide range of stakeholders, contributing to positive workplace cultures and a better understanding of customers & markets.

- Companies commonly provide staff access to company chaplains or other forms of spiritual care.

- Companies embracing religious DEI have clear procedures for requesting religious accommodations and for reporting instances of religious discrimination.

- Companies often match employee donations to faith-based charities.

NEWS OF THE WORLD

U.S. House Passes Religious Freedom Bill Pointed at Russia

The Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act, H.R. 496, passed the U.S. House in late April 2022. As detailed on the congress.gov page, "This bill directs the President, when determining whether Russia is a country of particular concern for religious freedom under certain federal laws, to consider incidents occurring in the parts of Ukraine that Russia (or any Russia-affiliated non-state group) occupies, controls, or recognizes as independent. (The United States

may take certain actions, such as withdrawing development assistance, against a country of particular concern for religious freedom.)"

The U.S. State Department added Russia to the CPC, or "country of particular concern," list in 2021, and the House subsequently drafted H.R. 496 as a U.S. response to religious freedom in Ukraine. It imposes visa restrictions and denies entry to this country to any Russian officials who have been responsible for viola-

tions to religious freedom in Ukrainian territory. The bill will now go before the Senate.

"This legislation would ensure that the President of the United States has the authority and mandate to impose costs on Russian officials who are responsible for such assaults on religious freedom," says bill sponsor Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.).

Few foreign nationals would have their travel affected by the bill, but government officials would.

**The President
may now
impose U.S.
restrictions
on Russian
officials
who assault
religious
freedoms.**

Southern Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Public Affairs and Religious Liberty
P.O. Box 923868
Peachtree Corners, GA 30010

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Supreme Court Rules Boston Violated Christian Group's Free Speech Rights by Refusing Flag

The Supreme Court of the United States has ruled — unanimously — that the City of Boston violated the free speech rights of Camp Constitution when they denied them a permit to fly the Christian flag at city hall, as had previously been allowed for numerous other groups.

The city denied the flag on the basis of not wishing to endorse religion. However, SCOTUS found that when a flag belongs to a

private organization, as has long been allowed at city hall, then it is not considered government speech.

"We conclude that, on balance, Boston did not make the raising and flying of private groups' flags a form of government speech," noted Justice Stephen Breyer in the court's written opinion. He also said that the city had therefore violated Camp Constitution's free speech rights.

In making their determi-

nation, SCOTUS looked at the context of the request, the city's history of letting organizations fly flags at city hall, those private flags not historically being government supported, and how much the Boston city government actually controlled the flags and their messages.

Responding to the last point, "The answer, it seems, is not at all," Breyer wrote. "And that is the most salient feature of this case."

Boston had denied the group's Christian flag because they didn't want to appear to endorse religion.