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**The Orthodox Church of Ukraine celebrates spiritual and governance independence from Moscow and Russian Orthodoxy.**



## Russia, Ukraine Conflict Could Pivot on Religion, Touch Religious Liberty

Russia and Ukraine dominate the news with stories of invasion, war, and refugees, but a religious story is also playing out behind the scenes. There is conflict in the Orthodox Church.

The majority of Russians (71%) and Ukrainians (78%) identify as Orthodox, both religiously and culturally. However, in Ukraine two Orthodox churches both claim to be the true Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Ukrainian people. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church - Moscow Patriarchate is the older, larger church, and is a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church. The spiritual authority of this church lies in Moscow, and it emphasizes the bonds linking Ukraine and Russia.

The second church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, is younger, blessed by Constantinople, and recognized as an independent member of the Orthodox churches. Not surprisingly, this church celebrates its spiritual and governance independence from Moscow, recognizing Rus-

sians and Ukrainians as separate people, and is thus a challenge to Moscow.

The Moscow Patriarchate sees Russians and Ukrainians as one people, and President Vladimir Putin has made it clear this is also his opinion. He believes that the newer church has attacked the "spiritual unity" of Russian and Ukraine.

Though not obviously a religious liberty issue, there are ties. In the United States, Christian nationalists would like to unify religious conservatives. They want to partner American evangelicals, traditional Catholics in western countries, and Orthodox communities under the Russian Orthodox Church in a common front of "moral purity and Christian culture," according to journalist Diana Bass.

In the 10th century, a pagan prince brought modern-day Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine into a single realm, and converted the entire nation to Christianity. The

*Please turn to page 2...*

## NEWS OF THE WORLD

# New Law in Brazil State Gives Sabbath-keepers Accommodation

Sabbath-keepers in the state of Paraná, Brazil, will now have the right to refrain from or have alternative solutions for educational activities happening from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. The law reinforces and strengthens one from 2019 by extending it from students to teachers as well.

Authored by Deputy Art-agão Junior, the law applies to both public and private institutions. He noted that both Federal and State constitutions guarantee religious freedom, but that it has not always happened in practice.

"The achievement of Law No. 20,958 is immense,"

said Rubens Silva, director of the Religious Liberty Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Brazil. "The expectation is that this law is, who knows, the green light so that the other two states [Santa Catarina and the Rio Grande do Sul] can also have this support for religious freedom."

The state of Paraná has more than 80,000 Seventh-day Adventist Church members, according to reporting magazine *Adventist Today*. Of those, close to 18,000 are between the ages of 7 and 24, and are generally in school or entering a higher education course.

**Sabbath-keeping students and teachers will benefit from the new law.**

## Pastor Wants Church, State Joined

A congressional candidate in South Carolina has stated that the separation of church and state should come to an end in the U.S. Mark Burns is an evangelical Christian televangelist who spoke to attendees of the American Freedom Tour in Sunrise, Florida, in March. Burns was referring to the First Amendment, and claims that it is to keep government out of the church, not church out of the government.

Conversely, the First Amendment has traditionally been interpreted to mean that no particular religion

is favored over another by government, and that Amer-

## Ukraine, *cont.* from cover...

heart of this Christian empire was Kyiv — essentially Russian Orthodox's Jerusalem.

Invasions, wars, and changes in political power through the ages have led to centuries of tension between Ukraine and Russia. Today, Putin claims 1,000 years of Kyiv Christianity for Russia. He fights against the Patriarch of Constantinople, and is supported by

icans may hold any religious belief they choose.

the Patriarch of Moscow, who seeks to bond religious conservatives worldwide.

The war against Ukraine may indeed have religion at its core. As Putin seeks to recapture Moscow's Jerusalem, he also hopes to reinforce Moscow's spiritual and political authority — and possibly worldwide through the Christian (inter) nationalist movement.

- *The Justice Department has reached a settlement in favor of Light of the World (LOTW) Gospel Ministries Inc., a nondenominational Christian church, which was denied the right to build a church on land it owns in the Village Walthill, Nebraska. The town was found to have substantially burdened LOTW's religious exercise.*
- *Winnebago, Illinois, County must pay more than \$370K in attorneys' fees for violating a Christian nurse's rights by forcing her to refer women for abortions or provide aborting contraceptives against her religious beliefs and conscience. A Circuit Court judge ruled in favor of Sandra Rojas, who worked for the county health department 18 years before they fired her for not following the new requirement. "Healthcare professionals should not be required to violate their conscience to keep their jobs," said attorney Noel Sterett.*
- *U. S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced sanctions on China for their repression of ethnic and religious minorities inside and outside of China's borders — including genocide in Xinjiang, repressive policies in Tibet, and crackdowns on fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong.*

# Steps Toward Religious Liberty Sought, Maintained in Higher Education

## **Brigham Young University**

The U.S. Department of Education has dismissed a Title IX complaint against Brigham Young University. Filed in March 2020, the complaint accused BYU of discriminating against students in same-sex romantic relationships, which BYU said was not compatible with its honor code.

Title IX protects those participating in education programs that receive federal funding from sex-based discrimination. However, the complaint against BYU was dismissed, citing the school's religious exemption.

"BYU affirms that the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution and federal law includes the freedom to operate a religious university without sacrificing distinctive religious beliefs or practices," said Kevin J.

Worthen, president of BYU.

"At the same time, BYU welcomes and supports all our students and employees who agree to abide by the tenets of the Church of Jesus Christ, including those who identify as LGBTQ. We acknowledge the complicated realities that many of these individuals experience as they navigate issues surrounding sexual orientation, gender identity, and religious doctrine."

It is interesting to note that this is the opposite approach to the Department of Education lawsuit against 14 colleges (including La Sierra University) with codes of conduct regarding sexuality. See *Waymarks* 2021, Vol. 2 for that story: <https://www.southernunion.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2021MarApr.pdf>.

## **Ohio State University**

Student athletes across the state of Ohio may now participate in athletic competitions while wearing religious apparel without being required to have a waiver or advance permission, following the signing of House Bill 181 by Gov. Mike Dewine after unanimous house approval.

Prior to this bill, cross country runner Noor Abukaram was stripped of a personal record and disqualified from a 5K race in 2019 because she wore a hijab of the Muslim faith without obtaining a waiver. Abukaram then spearheaded an effort to end religious discrimination in athletics. Ohio's is the first law passed, and is now known as "Noor's Law."

**The runner was stripped of a record and disqualified for wearing a hijab without prior permission.**

# Indiana Changes Vaccination Exemption Bill

The Indiana Senate Health Committee passed House Bill 1001 early in 2022. The bills COVID-19 vaccination exemptions changed radically before passing, though, after what essentially was a debate between the business community and those wanting extremely liberal vaccination exemptions.

Original wording of the bill said employers "must allow" exemptions from employees with "strongly held religious belief," and included

punitive action towards non-conforming employers. It restricted COVID job testing to once a week, and at no cost to the employee. The original also prohibited employers from demoting or firing employees who requested accommodation. Language entitling those fired to unemployment has also been removed.

The new bill now refers only to Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, for those seeking exemptions; an em-

ployee can file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission if they believe their employer violated Title 7, but this process can take a year or more, with fees of \$10,000 and up.

Businesses have praised the change, saying private businesses should be able to operate without government interference. Caryl Auslander, speaking for the South Bend Regional Chamber of Commerce and other businesses, said "employers

know best" what they need to do to protect their workforce, including mandating the COVID-19 vaccination.

The bill, which had the amendment sponsored by Sen. Mark Messmer, R-Jasper, now says COVID testing may be required twice a week and at the employee's expense. It also now disallows health care workers from seeking exemption.

The bill passed 8-2, with two Democrats voting no, and all Republicans voting yes.

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## Nurse Practitioner Charges CVS with Religious Discrimination

A nurse practitioner who worked in the CVS Pharmacy clinic in Keller, Texas, has filed a religious discrimination complaint. Robyn Strader, 72, said she'd secured religious accommodation not to prescribe contraceptives when she was hired, but she was fired six years later when CVS ended religious accommodations.

Christine Pratt, counsel for Strader, said that contraception was requested only on "rare occasions," and Strader would refer them to another nurse practitioner at her location or the

CVS two miles away. This ended when CVS said that "all nurses must perform essential services related to pregnancy prevention." Strader's manager told her that their supervisor said the company would no longer honor religious accommodations.

Pratt adds that CVS now claims Strader had never requested religious accommodation, and that if she did it would cause the company undue hardship.

"The corporate canceling of faithful religious Americans like Robyn must end,"

said Pratt, continuing, "It's bad medicine to force religious health care professionals to choose between their faith and their job, especially at a time when we need as many health care professionals as we can get."

Catholic institutions have historically been opposed to federal mandates requiring employees to provide health plans that provide contraception and drugs that can cause abortions. Strader is Baptist, but embraces this belief and its religious freedom protections.

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