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NAD Officers Uphold Human Dignity, Decency

The North American Division (NAD) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has issued "An Appeal for Human Dignity and Decency" in response to recent federal changes which allow immigration officers on the premises of churches and schools.

Excerpts from this document:

- The Adventist Church supports the rights of all persons, no matter their country of origin — the equal rights provided in the U.S. Constitution and fair treatment as immigrants and refugees in this country.

- Members believe that "we are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation" (Fundamental Belief #14).

- An appeal to policymakers and government leaders is found in *The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (p. 92): "...All are gifted, needed, and treasured. All are created in the image of God with an inherent dignity regardless of any limitation they may have." Therefore, let the laws and implementation of those laws treat all of God's children, who are created in His image, with the dignity and decency they deserve.

In addition to their statement, the NAD has compiled some general guidance to schools/churches regarding law enforcement presence onsite and surrounding issues, which can be found on their website along with the preceding statement in its entirety.

Waymarks is non-partisan. This newsletter focuses on religious liberty issues, regardless of party affiliation to those issues. Every cycle of a new administration, including the most recent one, creates new and differing concerns in the religious liberty arena. To review areas of concern and resulting decisions from previous administrations, please reference our archives online: southernunion.com/waymarks.

Quakers, 27 Others Sue Over ICE Arrests During Church Services

The Quakers are the first religious body to file suit in a federal district court challenging the change of policy at the Department of Homeland Security, which now allows immigration agents to enter churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship for immigration enforcement. *Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends v. U.S. Department of Homeland Security* alleges that the policy change violates the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the 1st Amendment's protection of expressive association, and the Administrative Procedure Act.

An additional 27 religious groups have also filed suit, saying that the policy infringes on their religious freedom, and noting that

congregations have seen decreased attendance due to fear. The first paragraph of the suit states, "They bring this suit unified on a fundamental belief: Every human being, regardless of birthplace, is a child of God worthy of dignity, care, and love. Welcoming the stranger, or immigrant, is thus a central precept of their faith practices."

Organizational bodies protesting alongside the Quakers include the Mennonites, United Church of Christ, Church of the Brethren Inc., Hispanic Baptist Convention, Episcopal Church, Friends, Presbyterian Church, Latino Christian National Network, Unitarian Universalist, Wisdom Inc., four conferences of the United Methodist Church, four Jewish organizations; State Councils of Churches from Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin; and individual churches of African Methodist Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, Fellowship, and Conservative Judaism.

"Churches are, and have always been, places of prayer, solace, and safety since the time of Jesus Christ; this does not change with any new emperor, king, or president."

Laura Everett, Exec. Dir., Mass. Council of Churches

Additionally, the Pope responded to Vice President Vance, a Catholic, after Vance remarked that people should care for their family, communities, and country before caring for others. The Pope wrote, "Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extend to other persons and groups."

- *An Executive Order has been issued from President Trump. "Expanding Educational Freedom and Opportunity for Families" focuses on methodology for expanding school choice beyond residentially-assigned public schools. Schools would include private, faith-based, or public charter schools.*

- *A nominee for the U.S. 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals, Adeel Mangi, has stated the Senate did not approve his nomination due to anti-Muslim sentiment. Mangi expected questions on qualifications, philosophy, and legal issues, but was instead asked about Israel, whether he supported Hamas, and whether he celebrated 9-11 — implying support for terrorism. He also pointed out that the "Constitution forbids religious tests for any Office of the U.S."*

- *The Justice Department has sued Brunswick, GA, for violating RLUIPA by attempting to shut down The Well, a hospitality and religious resource center for the homeless, without giving compelling evidence of its safety concerns. Additionally, they said the city "imposed a substantial burden on the religious exercise of FaithWorks," the owning organization and an extension of the Methodist Church.*

Seventh-day Adventist Church
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Trump Establishes White House Faith Office Via Executive Order

President Trump has issued an Executive Order establishing the White House Faith Office. Less than three weeks earlier he had revoked President Biden's Executive Order creating a White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

The newest Executive Order includes the following: "The executive branch wants faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship, to the fullest extent permitted by law, to compete on a level playing field for grants, contracts, programs, and other Federal funding opportunities."

It will advise on policy implementations throughout the federal government, and help faith-based organizations procure government grants, among other

responsibilities. Trump said he wants to root out "anti-Christian bias" in the U.S., and also announced a new task force to investigate the "targeting" of Christians. He said the task force would be directed to "immediately halt all forms of anti-Christian targeting and discrimination within the federal government..."

Trump's new task force drew questions and criticism from Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which fears incorrect definition and usage of the term "religious freedom."

"Rather than protecting religious beliefs, this task force will misuse religious freedom to justify bigotry, discrimination, and the subversion of our civil rights laws," said Rachel Laser, the group's president and CEO.

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NOTE: Following are issues to watch in the coming weeks as they develop.

- *The Texas State Board of Education has approved a controversial elementary curriculum featuring Bible references in its English and language arts material. There is no requirement for schools to adopt, but there are financial incentives. A Jewish parent and scholar has offered that the curriculum is biblically illiterate.*

- *The Supreme Court of the U.S. will consider whether Oklahoma may fund what would be the nation's first religious charter school. Establishing the Catholic school would allow government to establish and fund a religious school with tax dollars for the first time.*

- *Georgia may be adopting a Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). It would make them the 38th state to provide people of faith with the same protections from state and local government which they already have from the federal government.*

- *Kentucky lawmakers are deciding whether to reinstall a granite statue of the 10 Commandments — previously removed as a First Amendment violation — at the Capitol. They are also considering allowing educators to read and post them in schools.*

Church Over State, Continued from back cover

is part of a growing trend to attribute modern conservative religious beliefs to the founding fathers. Jefferson, presented in this manner, might even appear to have wanted church and state to come together. While offshoot groups have presented these ideas for quite a while, they are now being offered by members of Congress. And, though it is a misnomer and clearly not the original intent

of the founding fathers, what is being encouraged is that the state cannot tell the church what to do, *but the church can tell the state what to do.*

And yet, ironically, House Resolution 59 took Mariann Budde to task, accusing her of being "the church" trying to direct the government.

This paradox should lead Americans to ask questions: 1) Is it right for the state to condemn the language of

the church — particularly when presented within the church? 2) What could happen if the church disagrees with the state, as in Budde's case? And, 3) What if church and state join hands, but the state's church disagrees with *your* church?

Adventists have added insight into these dangers, and know that this is why the separation of church and state is what all *must* fight to keep.

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Leaders Continue Redefining Church-State Separation

"In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now." This was part of a sermon given by Mariann Edgar Budde, lead pastor at the National Cathedral, during the National Prayer Service, January 21, 2025, at her church. She was making a plea for the LGBTQ community and immigrant laborers who are not in the country legally.

Reaction to this fell on predictable political lines, even within communities of faith. Liberal Christians said she was "speaking truth to

power." Conservative Christians found it confrontational and disrespectful. Despite opinions on the appropriateness of Budde's sermon, it is important to note another event.

Rep. Mike Johnson, in his acceptance speech to return as Speaker of the House, recited a prayer he said was given by President Thomas Jefferson. However, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation notes that Jefferson doubted "the efficacy of prayer" and "rejected the notion of the Trinity and Jesus' divinity." He did

not believe in miracles, original sin, or the deity of Jesus. He even adopted a Bible from which he removed the four Gospels. When asked to recommend a national day of fasting and prayer, he replied, "I consider the government of the U.S. as interdicted by the Constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises."

Johnson, though, was trying to present Jefferson as a godly Christian. This

Please turn to pg. 3...

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