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EDITOR: Sheila Elwin
religiousliberty@southernunion.com

2025 | Volume 5

The Church "... seeks to inform the conscience and behavior ... so decisions can be made with maximum understanding and thought."



Current Events Prompt Review of Church Stance on Noncombatancy

Current national and global dynamics are claiming our attention: tensions in the Middle East, between Russia and Ukraine, with China and Iran, and elsewhere appear to be growing, along with anti-American sentiment in parts of the world. There have been recent changes to U.S. military policy and operations, as well as using American cities as "training grounds" for the military to combat unrest and violent crime. While answers to much of this may involve rhetoric, diplomacy, and sanctions, there is still a heightened sense of global instability.

In the interest of readiness for all possibilities, Adventist Church members may want to take a closer look at the Church's historical stance on noncombatancy, or the conscientious objection to bearing arms. The Adventist Church was organized during the midst of the Civil War, and so was immediately called to study an appropriate response. Church pioneers, through Bible research,

became convicted of noncombatancy, and successfully received that official designation from the federal government in 1864. The Church has held this position ever since.

The Adventist stance also embraces our belief in the separation of church and state, and upholds the religious liberty inherent in the right to conscientiously object to military service. Likewise, the Church discourages its members from joining the military. However, this is not a test of membership, and the Church "does not seek to be the conscience for any member."

Keep in mind that this choice is always a matter of individual conscience. However, Seventh-day Adventist young people today could be looking at a draft being reinstituted. As with other issues, Church members will want to continue encouraging and mentoring them, making them aware of our teachings and beliefs so they are prepared for all that may come.

OLC Issues Opinion on Religious Liberty for Federal Employees

The Justice Department Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) recently issued an advisory opinion at the request of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The Commission was studying a 1997 document of guidelines on religious exercise and religious expression in the federal workplace, as well as a 2017 memorandum on federal law protections for religious liberty, and wanted to know how much of it remained operative. The OLC determined the prior directives should still be enforced, but with two exceptions based on recent cases.

The first exception was based on the Supreme Court decision in *Groff*, where the Court determined that “undue hardship” for employ-

ers only occurs when the burden of accommodation would be “substantial in the overall context of an employer’s business.” Thus, an employer cannot deny religious accommodation if the burden of that accommodation is “insubstantial.” This changed the 1997 “de minimis” standards.

The second exception also applied to the 1997 guidelines, which said an employer cannot “restrict personal religious expression by employees in the Federal workplace,” unless it “creates the appearance, to a reasonable observer, of an official endorsement of religion,” which should be restricted. The OLC decided this endorsement test was not constitutionally valid.

**SCOTUS
still upholds
government
employers
prohibiting
disruptive
or coercive
religious
behavior.**

- In an update to Texas’ efforts to post the Ten Commandments in schools, a federal judge has temporarily blocked implementation of the new law. The ruling affects 11 school districts in the challenge brought by Dallas-area families, who fought the law as a violation of the First Amendment. Plaintiffs include Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Unitarian Universalist, and nonreligious families.

- American Marriage Ministries, an organization that ordains ministers online, has lost their challenge to Tennessee after state officials refused to provide it with both the non-prosecution assurances and agreements not to challenge their marriages which had been previously given to another church. AMM was unable to show significant proof of violation of the Establishment Clause.

- Ohio’s state motto, “With God, all things are possible,” is facing a petition calling for its removal. Adopted in 1959 after a 10-year-old schoolboy proposed it in a letter to the newspaper, garnered signatures, and presented it to the State Senate, the phrase directly quotes scripture, which is unusual for a state motto. The current petition says government should not display language tied to one faith tradition.

Hawaii’s Supreme Court Interprets State’s Establishment Clause

In 1922, the then Territory of Hawaii made a land grant to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). The grant dictated that the land be used for LDS purposes only. If it was used for anything else, it would immediately revert to the Territory of Hawaii.

More than 100 years later, the property has changed hands numerous times. The current secular owners, in *Hilo Bay Marina, LLC v. State of Hawaii*, sought a judg-

ment saying the reversionary clause was invalid.

A previous lower court had ruled in favor of the state, but the state’s Supreme Court ruled in favor of the new owners, agreeing that the old rule was based on historical practices and understandings which now violate Hawaii’s Establishment Clause in its state Constitution of 1959.

The significance of this case and ruling is that Hawaii’s Supreme Court chose

not to impose a 100-year-old religious restriction on a non-religious party. If they had enforced the restriction, the court would have been forcing them to act religiously — or else to give up the right to land which they had purchased fairly.

Commendably, Hawaii upheld a critical understanding of the Establishment Clause, keeping church and state separate, and not forcing religion on those who do not wish to act in a religious way.

Texas Votes Controversial Law Hailed as "Anti-Sharia," Critics Say is Religious Profiling

Texas Governor Greg Abbott has signed a law that blocks the creation of the 400-acre EPIC City, named for the East Plano Islamic Center in Plano. While not technically a ban of all-Muslim communities, the proposed development was referred to by critics as a "Sharia compound."

EPIC is a large mosque in Plano, a suburb of Dallas. The growing population of Muslims in the area is overwhelming the mosque. Subsequently, an EPIC member who is a realtor suggested buying land and creating a community which would

welcome Muslims.

Critics, including the Governor, say the development would be exclusively for Muslims, and would enforce Sharia law, creating discrimination against non-Muslims. Developers deny the claims, and say that the community would be open to people of all faiths. They say that, while their intent was to create a self-sustaining community for Muslims, it was not meant to be exclusive.

The new law, House Bill 4211, is a ban on any property development which restricts residency or sales

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based on religious affiliation. It does not mention Sharia law, but supporters have upheld it as a way to prevent "Sharia compounds."

While supporters of HB 4211 believe it protects religious freedom by preventing discrimination, critics have labeled it an "Islamophobic witch hunt" and religious profiling.

The investigation and legal proceedings have stalled the EPIC project, but the developers say that they intend to work within the law, cooperate with authorities, and continue the project.

Student's Sabbath Accommodation Plea Granted by University on Second Request

The University of Wisconsin (UW) has finally granted a religious accommodation request for Orly Gallo, a Jewish freshman. Specifically, the request pertained

to housing which would accommodate her Sabbath observance needs.

Gallo had requested to be housed in a dorm close to the Hillel and Chabad buildings on campus to accommodate her need to walk to Sabbath services after sundown.

UW originally placed her on the far side of the campus because of a lottery system for housing. When she made her first request, they denied her, saying their lottery system had no exceptions. However, the university does make exceptions for issues like on-campus jobs and medical status.

Her second request, in partnership with First Liberty Institute and the law firm Eimer Stahl LLP, pointed out the religious protections of the First Amendment. This request was granted.

"We are grateful the University recognized the need

to grant Orly's request, and we fully expect them to implement a policy change so that future students can receive religious accommodations as well," said Kayla Toney, counsel for First Liberty.

Save the Date!

Religious Liberty Sabbath
January 10, 2026

**Southern Union Adventist
Attorney Retreat**
August 13-16, 2026

**Religious Liberty
Conference: Celebrating
America's 250th at
Colonial Williamsburg**
August 16-20, 2026



Calling all Pastors & Religious Liberty Leaders

The year 2026 will be a year of celebrations. We mark this year as *Liberty Magazine's* 125th year. And, we celebrate our Independence as a Nation turning 250.

As one of the many free services we provide, you can book a Religious Liberty Sabbath through our office. Additionally, we have many different afternoon seminars to choose from. Contact us at 770-408-1800 or ReligiousLiberty@southernunion.com. Appointment slots are already starting to fill up for 2026.

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

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NEWS OF THE WORLD

USCIRF Issues Update on Mass Atrocities Targeting Religious Communities

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has recently released "Preventing Mass Atrocities Targeting Religious Communities" as their latest policy update.

The USCIRF found that mass atrocities often follow growing religious freedom violations in a country. Examples of these atrocities recognized by the U.S. government and the U.N. include the ISIS genocidal

campaign against Yazidis, Christians, and Shi'a Muslims in Iraq and Syria; the Chinese Communist Party's genocide against Muslim Uyghurs and other minorities; the Burmese military's genocide against Rohingya Muslims; and the Ottoman Empire's genocide of Armenians and other religious and ethnic minorities.

The new update enlarges on the link between violations and atrocities, and

it cross-references the top 30 countries which are now most at risk, in order of that risk: Chad, Sudan, Burma/Myanmar, Pakistan, India, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Guinea, Yemen, Nigeria, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Niger, Iraq, South Sudan, Philippines, Russia, Rwanda, Mali, Turkey, Egypt, Tajikistan, China, Mozambique, Somalia, Angola, and Thailand.

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