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EDITOR: Sheila Elwin
religiousliberty@southernunion.com

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Sunday laws run counter to the First Amendment, which preserves religious freedom by requiring government to remain neutral.



Proposal for Sunday Rest in U.S. Addressed by Adventist Church

Parts of the following are excerpted or summarized from the North American Division response.

A proposal by a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy organization to legally recognize and enforce a “uniform day of rest” represents a disturbing disregard for the religious freedom of all Americans. The Heritage Foundation’s document, “Saving America by Saving the Family,” calls for states and local municipalities to restrict commercial activities on Sunday to promote spiritual engagement and provide a regular day of relaxation for American workers.

However, it is important to note that there is no proposed legislation at this time. The report does suggest that we should be enforcing the Sunday blue laws that currently exist, and bemoans the fact that most are not being enforced, but the organization is not a government entity.

Nevertheless, Heritage Foundation’s proposal for a “uniform day of rest” is unacceptable, and

speaks to using state power to advance religious objectives. Further, restricting commerce on Sunday creates practical concerns for those who do not worship on Sunday — including Adventists and Orthodox Jews — but conduct business on that day.

Seventh-day Adventists believe all should have the freedom to worship according to their conscience, and the Church always stands against any form of Sunday law.

To read Church’s full statement, scan the QR code below. Additionally, if you would like to get weekly updates on Church news, you can sign up for *NewsPoints*. The QR code takes you to the Church statement, and you can navigate from there to the Search menu, to News, to *NewsPoints* to subscribe.



Court Decision Affects Belief Requirements in Organizations

The Ninth Circuit, a federal appeals court, has ruled that religious organizations have the right to staff any or all positions with workers who share their faith, and that this is in line with the church autonomy doctrine. The ruling was made against Washington state officials and enforcement of the Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD) in a case against the Union Gospel Mission of Yakima.

The court determined that the First Amendment's church autonomy doctrine applies to more than just the "ministerial exception." It safeguards a religious organization's ability to hire those who believe the same in non-ministerial

roles like office administrators and other support personnel. Religious nonprofits may require all employees to adhere to their code of conduct and beliefs without government interference, as long as the hiring policy is based on sincerely held religious belief.

The decision addressed a conflict between state anti-discrimination laws and the First Amendment's religion clauses, with the First Amendment prevailing. However, the church autonomy doctrine applies to hiring, and does not give religious groups permission to discriminate on other grounds, such as race or other protected classes unrelated to religious belief.

Religious groups may hire employees who share their belief system.

California Makes Decision About Sharing Information With Parents

A federal judge in California ruled that school policies which require teachers to hide a student's gender transition from parents are unconstitutional. The December 2025 decision affirmed parents' rights to guide their children's upbringing, and Judge Roger Benitez called the policies a violation of parents' constitutional rights, and said they also forced teachers to be deceitful.

However, in January 2026, the Ninth Circuit Court of

Appeals paused that ruling, which allows California to continue its policies while the legal battle continues. The California attorney general appealed the 2025 ruling, and argued that "outing" transgender students threatens safety and emotional well-being.

The original lawsuit was brought by teachers, who felt that the school policies forced them to violate their free speech and religious freedom rights, and caused them to interfere in

parent-child relationships.

The U.S. Department of Education, in a January 28 statement, said "the California Department of Education is in continued violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act — a federal law granting parents the right to access their child's education records — for policies that pressure school officials to conceal information about students' 'gender identity.'"

This legal battle may end up in the Supreme Court.

- *Mark Walker, a former Republican congressman for North Carolina's 6th Congressional District and former pastor, has been appointed by President Donald Trump as the U.S. principal adviser on global religious freedom to the U.S. State Department.*
- *Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has appealed a lower court's preliminary injunction requiring schools to remove displays of the 10 Commandments. A federal judge in November 2025 ordered several school districts to remove Ten Commandments posters by December 1, 2025, calling the requirement unconstitutional. This ongoing case is expected to eventually have possible Supreme Court implications for other states.*
- *The Supreme Court of the United States has ordered a federal appeals court to review an old lawsuit brought by Amish parents in the state of New York who wanted to reinstate religious exemptions for refusing vaccines. The SCOTUS directive will have the 2nd Circuit court apply the new standard from Mahmoud, a case involving parents in Maryland. In the Maryland case, plaintiffs said that since the state allows medical exemptions, the ban on religious exemptions unfairly targeted people of faith.*

NEWS OF THE WORLD

Samoa Challenged by Christian Nationalism

Samoa's prime minister has suggested restricting religious liberty for non-Christians. The South Pacific island has a population of 220,000, the majority of whom are Christian.

Prime Minister Laauliale-malietoa Polataivao Fosi Schmidt said he wanted to stop Samoa encountering the same religious divisions as "neighboring countries," and in the Middle East. He is asking for input from Samoa's Council of Churches — a Christian organization — and said he is prepared to "consider amending the constitution regarding the freedom of religion."

Since being elected in August 2026, his government has already made weekly fasting and prayer mandatory for public employees, and has placed a ban on any construction on Sundays. "No one is permitted to use any loud machines on Sunday," he said. "This is the situation now: foreigners have come and are working on our Sundays, disregarding our faith."

Samoa's imam, Husam-Aldin Stanley, says about 200 Muslims live in Samoa. "We're just living our own life in a peaceful way," he said. "That's why many people don't know Islam has been

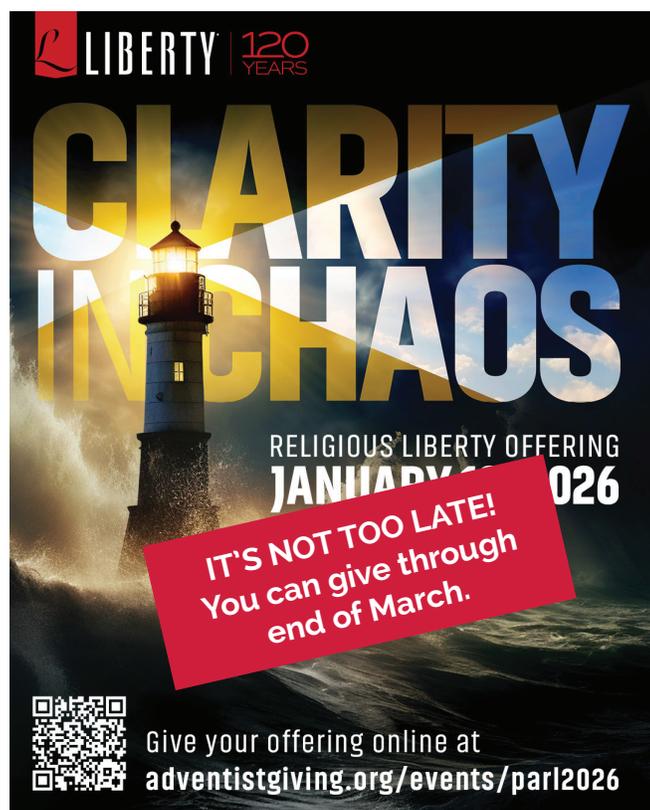
Weekly prayer and fasting are mandatory for public employees, and construction work has now been banned on Sundays.

in this country for more than 30 years." Likewise, Samoa's Baha'i temple is a place of worship for the country's well-established Baha'i community.

In 2011, the Samoan government began enforcing Christian instruction in public primary schools. In 2017, Samoa's parliament amended the constitution to declare it a Christian nation, a statement previously confined to its preamble.

Experts say the government's policies raise questions about the separation of church and state. The new proposals bring religion and politics a step closer.

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

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Sanctity Concerns Considered for Protests/ICE in Churches

While there is a long history of civil disobedience in the United States, protests inside churches are not usual. Churches have long been known as sacred spaces, not open to either protests or arrests within their framework.

Nevertheless, incidents of civil disruption go all the way back to colonial America, and continue throughout the nation's history: radical Quakers in colonial times; future African Methodist Episcopal members in the 18th century; civil rights activists in the 1960s; and, in more recent years, demon-

strations at churches over the topics of AIDS, steel industry workers, and the Israel/Gaza conflict.

Most recently, anti-ICE protesters interrupted a service in a Southern Baptist congregation. Three days later, three of the protesters were arrested on federal charges.

Faith leaders have also been shaken by the announcement that federal immigration agencies can now make arrests inside churches, schools, and hospitals, all of which have been considered "sensitive" spaces.

This appears to be a double standard in government regarding who is allowed to disrupt a church.

Immigration raids during church services have yet to be reported, but many churches have developed policies to address the eventuality. Arrests have been made in church parking lots.

Protests on sacred territory is not legal. Armed entry of law enforcement is not welcome. While churches must always act within the law, they should also voice disapproval of any interruptions of sacred space.

**Church has
always been
treated as
a sacred
space,
which we
strive to
maintain.**