

What You Need to Know to About Religious Liberty

Freedom of religion is the first freedom in the Bill of Rights. Many people starting in the 17th century left Europe to come to America to avoid religious persecution. Without freedom of religion, all other freedoms are on shaky ground; and if freedom of religion is abolished, all other freedoms will follow, collapsing like a house of cards.

Those That Oppose Religious Liberty Have Declared War

Could freedom of religion really be abolished? The enemies of religious liberty have declared a war to do nothing less! For example

- Individuals and groups with religious objections to abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and contraception are under attack from a coercive federal mandate that would force them to provide these very drugs and services in their health care plans.
- Same sex marriage and civil union laws that do not contain robust religious exemptions threaten the rights of religious individuals and groups who, for religious reasons, cannot acknowledge the union of a same gender couple.
- Religious groups' autonomy rights are being eroded by politically correct policies that would force law school student groups, for example, to accept non-members as leaders of their religious student club.
- The words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance are being challenged by those who would eradicate any reference to God in the public square.
- Memorials with religious imagery are in danger of being ripped from their very foundations.
- Children in schools are being told they cannot pray over meals or at high school graduations.
- Pastors praying in Jesus' name are labeled "intolerant" and their teaching from the Bible is treated as "hate speech."

These are only a small handful of examples.

The aggressors are anti-religious activists like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF).

Blatantly misusing terms like "fairness" and "separation of church and state," these organizations will not rest until America has been cleansed of its religious heritage and the freedom to communicate truth has been abolished from every sector of public life.

How to Win

The key to defeating these attacks is knowledge. Become aware. When citizens know their religious rights, they stand up for their rights and freedoms and prevail in the public square. Here is what you need to know:

When Churches Are Attacked, You Need to Know:

(Applies to churches and other religious organizations)

- Churches have the right to exist, meaning that they can meet, purchase land, construct buildings, have Bible studies, and expand their already-existing buildings.

- Churches have the right to serve, such as through outreach or community service.
- Churches have the right to church autonomy. The government cannot interfere with human resource decisions, determination or application of doctrine, or church discipline.
- Pastors have freedom in the pulpit, including the freedom to discuss political issues and positions.

In summary,

CHURCHES MAY NOT:

1. Endorse or oppose a particular candidate
2. Contribute to or use church resources for one candidate over another (including free use of church list)

CHURCHES MAY (among other activities):

1. Register their members as voters
2. Pass out non-partisan Voter's Guides
3. Invite all candidates in a race to speak (O.K. if only one shows up)
4. Speak directly about specific issues and legislation (abortion, marriage, etc.)

When Schools and Students Are Attacked, You Need to Know:

(Applies to schools or universities)

- Students and parents are free from religious censorship in the school environment.
- Teachers, principals, and staff have the right to live out their faith amongst each other in a non-coercive way.
- Religious organizations and clubs have the same access, benefits, and opportunities as other, non-religious clubs or organizations.

When Citizens Are Attacked in the Public Arena, You Need to Know:

(Applies when citizens gather outside the home, church, and private associations to interact, debate, and exchange ideas)

- People have the right to engage in religious speech such as public evangelism and prayer without government interference.
- Many religious displays have the right to stand without alteration.

Speak Up Movement on Campuses

Illegal discrimination against Christians on public university campuses is pervasive and must be confronted. The Constitution has something to say about this—and so should you. Go to

<http://www.speakupmovement.org/University>

National public service law firms working on protecting religious liberty:

Alliance Defense Fund – www.telladf.org

Liberty Institute- www.LibertyInstitute.org

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty – www.becketfund.org