

Continued from page 3

and alcohol free community for the youth to go for spring break at night to interact with each other in a fun safe environment." The facility is owned by Markus Q. Bishop, a former pastor. But Bishop, who once led the flock of Faith Christian Family Church, has legal troubles of his own; the *News Herald* also reported that he's currently on probation after making sexual advances toward a minor girl.

City officials revoked Life Center's tax exemption. It was unclear if the church also holds federal tax exemption.

Fired N.J. Teacher Wins Religious Discrimination Fight

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has ruled that the Phillipsburg, N.J., school district wrongly fired a public school teacher for distributing Bibles to students.

Walt Tutka lodged a religious discrimination complaint with the EEOC's Newark Area Office after the Phillipsburg School District terminated his contract. In his complaint, Tutka argued that district officials had violated his religious freedom rights by refusing to allow him to distribute the Bible.

The EEOC apparently thinks Tutka has a case, but Americans United objected to the finding. In a legal letter submitted to the EEOC's New York District Office, the church-state watchdog argues that the school district behaved correctly by firing Tutka.

"The courts have uniformly held that the distribution of Bibles to public-school students during the school day – whether by school officials or outsiders, and whether in class or during non-instructional time – violates the Establishment Clause," the letter stated.

"There's no ambiguity in the law here," said Ayesha N. Khan, AU's legal director. "Courts have ruled repeatedly that public schools are for teaching, not preaching. Tutka has no right to distribute Bibles to students."

The letter urged the EEOC to consider those court rulings as it resolves Tutka's complaint.

Wisc. Capital Bans Anti-Atheist Discrimination

The Madison, Wisc., city council last month added atheists to its list of protected classes, the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel* reports. The move prohibits discrimination against atheists in employment, housing and other public accommodation matters.

"This is important because I believe it is only fair that if we protect religion, in all its varieties, we should also protect nonreligion from discrimination. It's only fair," the measure's co-sponsor, District 18 Alderwoman Anita Weier, said.

Although atheism is not a religion, non-believers would generally be protected under existing laws that bar discrimination on the basis of religion. The ordinance, by specifically mentioning atheists, is believed to be the first of its kind.

The ordinance has its detractors. "I figured it was an April Fool's joke. Unfortunately it's not an April Fool's Joke," said Julaine Appling of Wisconsin Family Watch, a local Religious Right group. "It's very Madisonian."

Americans United Fights Tenn. Bills

Tennessee legislators have proposed a measure that would make the Bible the state's official book and another that would widen use of private school vouchers. Americans United opposed both measures in letters submitted to the legislature, arguing that they would erode the wall of separation between church and state.

AU's Legislative Department argued that HB 1049, the "Tennessee Choice and Opportunity Scholarship Act" would expand the state's existing voucher program and create a loophole that channels public funds to private, sectarian schools. "One of the most dearly held principles of religious liberty is that government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with which he or she disagrees, or even a religion with which he or she does agree," the letter stated.

A companion version of the bill, SB 999, has already passed the State Senate. Tennessee's Gov. Bill Haslam (R) has indicated he'll sign the bill if it reaches his desk.

A proposal to name the Bible the official state book attacked the First Amendment from a different angle, AU staffers said. "Officially designating the Holy Bible, a specifically Judeo-Christian religious text, as the official state book would place the State's seal of approval on the Holy Bible and undoubtedly demonstrate the State's preference for Christianity," they wrote. "These bills could cause Tennesseans who do not subscribe to the Christian faith to feel like outsiders in their own state."

Some leaders in the state Senate expressed skepticism about the bill, and on April 16, members of that body voted 22-9 to send the measure back to a committee. The move effectively killed the bill for this year.

AROUND THE WORLD

Italians Debate Role Of Prayer In Public Schools

A coalition of parents and teachers in Italy recently filed a lawsuit over a Bologna public school's plan to host Roman Catholic prayers.

Giosuè Carducci Elementary School intended to hold a series of prayers to mark the Easter holiday last month. Although the prayers are voluntary and were to be held after school hours, some still object to what they characterize as an endorsement of Roman Catholicism.

In an interview with *The New York Times*, Adele Orioli of the Union of Atheists and Rationalistic Agnostics argued that the practice could alienate religious minorities. "Is it fair that everyone has to see this, even if some students are Muslims, Buddhist or atheists?" she asked.

Supporters of the prayers contend instead that Catholicism is simply part of Italy's cultural legacy and that offering sectarian prayers doesn't amount to proselytization.

"It is not a matter of faith. It is a matter of belonging to a tradition," the Rev. Raffaele Buono told *The Times*.

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