

# Bible Giveaway Banned at School on Religious Freedom Day

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Jerry Rutherford, president of World Changers, appeared before the Collier County School Board on Thursday to ask for a reversal of the decision but received the same response.

"This rejection is a slap in the face," said Rutherford, according to Naples News. "The decision to deny access to community groups that are religious in nature is censorship and bias."

In November, Rutherford routinely submitted his request to set up tables offering free Bibles to district students on Religious Freedom Day. But Superintendent Dennis Thompson, who had allowed the activity in the past two years, denied his request last week.

During the meeting with the district board, Rutherford cited the 1998 decision by a federal appeals court in *Peck vs. The Upshur County School Board*. The case upheld a West Virginia school district's right to give out any outside materials both religious and non-religious in a passive manner one day a year.

The Orlando-based Liberty Counsel also sent a letter on behalf of Rutherford to the board asking for the reversal of the decision. The Christian legal group had even offered to litigate the district's position for free.

But the board said it would stand behind the decision made by Thompson.

Rutherford says it's unconstitutional that he has been barred from passing out Bibles when the district allows other community groups, like the military, to distribute literature to students.

"We're losing our religious freedoms and that is very scary to me," he said, according to WINK News.

The delayed consideration and late decision denying Rutherford's routine request raises the issues of unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination and violation of the Establishment Clause, according to Liberty Counsel.

"If the school board does embark on this new course of action one that we believe is not constitutional we will tell them we will take all legal action to distribute material," said LC attorney Harry Mihet to an NBC affiliate in Fort Myers.

Each year, the President declares Jan. 16 to be Religious Freedom Day, which commemorates the anniversary of the 1786 passage of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.

In his declaration this year, outgoing President George W. Bush said there was no human freedom "more fundamental than the right to worship in accordance with one's conscience."

According to Bush, the day celebrates "the first liberties enshrined in our Constitution's Bill of Rights, which guarantee the free exercise of religion for all Americans and prohibit an establishment of religion."

"Our Nation was founded by people seeking haven from religious persecution, and the religious liberty they found here remains one of this land's greatest blessings," added Bush.

"Though we may profess different creeds and worship in different manners and places, we respect each other's humanity and expression of faith."

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