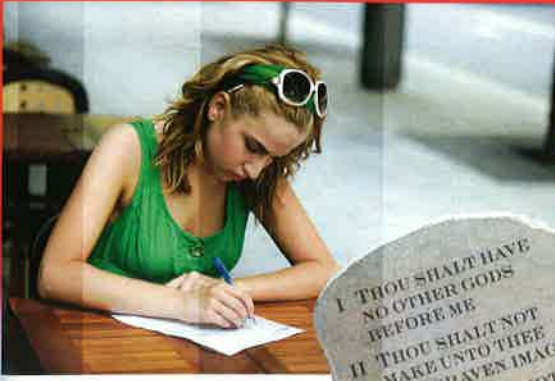


A Quick Start GUIDE



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

A Quick Start Guide for Religious Liberty

Manuscript created using materials from the Public Affairs and Religious Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Introduction

The purpose of this Quick Start Guide is to help local church religious liberty coordinators lead a ministry that proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ as the source of human freedom.

God asks the church to be a community of people sharing a common purpose and fellowship, as well as a light within the community it serves. Worshipping God according to conscience and sharing Christ's love are cherished freedoms, but not universally enjoyed. Free exercise of religion is like a fragile flower: it must receive vigorous protection and gentle care. Within these parameters, freedom of conscience thrives.

God's government is based on freedom of choice. This principle predates Eden, going back to the courts of heaven, where Lucifer and his sympathizers were given the freedom to choose whom they would serve. God chose to create humanity with the same power of choice –“See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil. . . . Therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:15-19).

True freedom is found only in God's law, a reflection of His character. James calls it “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). Peter warned of those who have become slaves to wanton lust: “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Peter 2:19). Satan is freedom's greatest foe and under his regime liberty of conscience is trampled underfoot.

Prophecy has foretold that Satan's plans would succeed amid the resurgence of a church-state union. A political power (the beast of Revelation 13) will rise and cause people to worship a religiopolitical entity. Revelation 17 symbolizes religion and politics by an apostate church (a decadent woman) being sustained by the government (the beast). The persecuting power of this union between church and state is illustrated by the woman, who becomes drunk with the blood of the saints.

What should we do about these threats to religious freedom? The Spirit of Prophecy admonishes, “It is our duty to do all in our power to avert the threatened danger. We should endeavor to disarm prejudice by placing ourselves in a proper light before the people. We should bring before them the real question at issue, thus interposing the most effectual protest against measures to restrict liberty of conscience” (*Testimonies for the Church* Vol. 5, p. 452).

For these reasons, every church should elect a religious liberty leader to keep up with last-day events and inform the church of vital religious liberty issues.

Job Description

Overview

The local church religious liberty leader has the opportunity to serve the church and community by alerting them to developments that may impact religious freedom. Some functions of this church office must be carried out at specific times during the year. Others will be done only upon the initiative of the person selected.

The person elected to this office should be dedicated to, and interested in, matters of religious freedom. He or she should also be or become familiar with the fundamental principles of religious liberty and the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on church-state issues. The local church religious liberty leader may thus not only serve the members of the local church, but may also become actively involved in religious liberty matters in the community.

The religious liberty leader should work closely with the pastor or church board to formulate plans for communicating important information to the congregation and community. The most significant issues and events should be reported to the local conference or union Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) director.

Spiritual Gifts

The religious liberty coordinator is an important spiritual leader in the local church. Discerning between true and false issues, spotting faulty reasoning, and holding one's tongue when tempted to strike out in retaliation are necessary attributes of those guarding religious freedom.

Find the Seventh-day Adventist Church's official statements and guidelines at www.adventist.org

The spiritual gift of teaching (Romans 12:7) will be especially important to fulfilling this role. Tact (1 Corinthians 12:8, Proverbs 25:11) is essential, especially when dealing with public officials, news media persons, and the public in general. Wisdom to say the right thing at the right time is a much-needed spiritual gift for religious liberty leaders; this goes along with the gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10).

Liberty Magazine and Religious Liberty Offering

Promote Liberty Magazine

Liberty magazine is the primary tool used by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States to discuss religious freedom and church-state separation issues. This journal is sent six times a year to government officials at all levels. Subscriptions are funded by the religious liberty offering collected each January in all North American Division churches. All religious liberty leaders should subscribe to Liberty magazine. Visit www.libertymagazine.org for more information.

Religious Liberty Offering and Campaign Period

Your first responsibility as religious liberty leader is to help your pastor conduct a Religious Liberty Campaign in your church and keep Liberty magazine and religious liberty issues before the church members throughout the year. Each January the North American Division releases a Liberty Campaign packet which includes detailed instructions. Read them carefully and you will find it easy to carry out this responsibility.

Set an example with your wholehearted support of Liberty. Encourage church members to subscribe to Liberty for themselves and give generously to send Liberty magazine to community, state, and national officials and thought leaders. For assistance call your conference or union PARL director.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts made by pastors and religious liberty leaders to promote and raise a good offering, the North American Division Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department is able to continue a variety of functions for the church and its members.

With funds raised through the annual religious liberty offering, Liberty magazine is sent to high level government officials, federal and state judges, and prominent social and religious leaders in North America. Also, hundreds of church members with Sabbath or religious accommodation problems have been assisted at the local conference and union level. A portion of the offering goes into a special legal defense fund to assist church members who find they must carry their Sabbath or religious accommodation cases to the courts.

During the annual Religious Liberty Campaign in January and February, you should plan to spend at least two hours a week in preparation.

Here are other ways you can promote religious freedom:

- Become a reporter for Liberty magazine. Watch for items you think may be of interest and send them to the editor.
- Prepare a special program for the Sabbath you will collect the religious liberty offering.
- Plan a religious liberty emphasis week with a special focus during the midweek service or prayer meeting.
- Prepare a special vespers program and make it a team effort. Coordinate with the pastor on when you will take the offering and what Sabbath the religious liberty sermon will be presented. Special promotional materials, including a poster and bulletin inserts, are provided by the North American Division for use during this time.

Communication

Be Alert to the Following Religious Liberty Issues

Report stories with religious liberty significance to your church. Some of these items should be reported to the local conference or union PARL director as well.

Topics and headlines to watch for:

- Sunday law issues on all levels
- City and state ordinances licensing or restricting religious literature
- Labor union problems and attempts to organize Seventh-day Adventist institutions
- Sabbath employment problems
- Sabbath civil service problems
- Sabbath examination problems
- Public elections held on Sabbath
- Laws that would place the government in the role of regulating or controlling religious activity or individual religious behavior
- Gambling laws

- Zoning laws affecting churches and schools
- Ordinances that could impact evangelism
- Tax exemptions for churches and church schools
- Issues involving government aid to religious schools
- School prayer issues
- Laws concerning the Ten Commandments

As articles on religious liberty issues appear in your newspaper, news magazines, on the radio, and on television, be alert of all details. Be accurate in your fact finding and BEWARE of rumors spread via the underground press. If items sound too fantastic to be true, they probably are. Verify questionable items with your conference or union PARL director.

Report authentic news concerning religious liberty issues regularly to members of your church. Include good news as well as bad news through church newsletters, the church bulletin, and during announcement time.

Maintain a Religious Liberty Bulletin Board

Seek permission from your pastor or church board to place a religious liberty bulletin board in an area in the church where members will find it easily. Post current news clippings, issue-oriented cartoons, and pertinent, timely quotations. Keep the bulletin board up-to-date.

Write Letters to the Editor

When local or national issues arise, write carefully-worded letters to the editor of your local newspaper. Before submitting your letter, have your pastor look it over. This is always a good step when writing on sensitive issues.

Serve as a Resource Coordinator

Develop a file of religious liberty resource materials for your church. Materials are available from your conference or union's PARL director on a variety of topics.

Also, keep a file of newspaper clippings on pertinent topics. Develop a bibliography of books available at your church or city library.

Watch for Religious Liberty Problems Among Church Members

Some church members are not aware that assistance is available to them as they face Sabbath employment problems or pressure to join labor unions. First, place these members in touch with your pastor or conference or union PARL

department. Pastors have guidelines for handling the initial steps. Most problem solving, whether for private sector or government, is done by the local conference or union PARL director. Your PARL director can assist members who need help gaining accommodations and more. Contact them if assistance is required.

Community Relations

Organize Religious Liberty Rallies for Your Church or District

Encourage your pastor to schedule area-wide religious liberty rallies in your church or district. Sabbath afternoons are best; however, with proper publicity, evening meetings during the week are often successful. Follow-up promotion via telephone is one way to obtain good attendance. Your conference or union can supply qualified speakers if notified well in advance.

Become Involved in Your Community

Become acquainted with your city and county public servants. Attend meetings to become better acquainted with the problems in your area. The following checklist will help you in your community contacts throughout the year:

1. Attend city and county government meetings periodically, even when no religious liberty topics are on the agenda, to become better acquainted with elected officials and the issues they deal with.
2. Inform your pastor and conference or union PARL director about major developments in your community that could affect religious freedom.
3. Organize local grassroots contacts when called for. Always consult with your conference or union PARL director before proceeding on major issues.
4. Report to your church all items from city or county council meetings of religious liberty significance.
5. Be sure all council members receive Liberty magazine.
6. Keep a current name and address file of city and county officials, including council members.

Give Recognition to the Significant Contributions of Civic Leaders

When a civic official in your community takes a strong stand on upholding religious liberty, contact your conference or union PARL director for assistance in recognizing the official by presenting an appropriate plaque or award at the church or in the official's office. Arrange for publicity in the local newspaper and your union paper. If you invite a public official to speak at your church, take precautions so it does not become a political appearance.

North American Religious Liberty Association

About NARLA

The North American Religious Liberty Association (NARLA) is a Seventh-day Adventist organization that exists to ensure that all peaceful people of faith are accorded our fundamental right to not only hold our beliefs but to actively practice our faith. They also work to ensure religion is not co-opted by the state through direct regulation or through financial control.

NARLA's primary goal is to advance our sacred religious liberty both here at home and around the world. NARLA is aware that religious liberty does not exist within a vacuum, but rather as part of an intricate weave of fundamental human rights. Thus NARLA also works on related human rights issues. To learn more about the many ways the men and women who make up the membership of NARLA are working to advance our God-given religious liberty, visit <http://religiousliberty.info>.

Many are willing to stand by silently as the people the Bible tells us this world is not worthy of are shamefully mistreated (Hebrew 11:38). But, thankfully, there are some faithful men and women willing to take a stand. Women and men who heed the advice of Ellen White when she said "we are not doing the will of God if we sit by quietly, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience."

Visit NARLA's website at <http://religiousliberty.info> where you can read the Liberty Blog, sign up for NARLA email alerts, and more.

Resources

General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department

Website: <http://parl.gc.adventist.org>

North American Division Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department

Website: www.nadfreedom.org

North American Religious Liberty Association

Website: <http://religiousliberty.info>

Pacific Union Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department

Website: www.churchstate.org

Northwest Religious Liberty Council

Website: www.nrla.com

International Religious Liberty Association

Website: www.irla.org

Liberty magazine

Website: www.libertymagazine.org

Religious Liberty Leader Ministry Description

To worship God according to conscience and to share Christ's love are cherished freedoms not universally enjoyed. The government of God is based on freedom of choice. God chose to create humanity also with the power of choice. "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil . . . blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19).

Free exercise of religion is like a fragile flower: it must receive the most vigorous protection possible and the most gentle care to be found. Within it, freedom of conscience thrives or is throttled.

Revelation 13 points to a political power that will arise in the last days causing people to "worship" another religion-political power. Religion and politics are symbolized in Revelation 17 by an apostate church being sustained by the government. The persecuting power of this union of church and state is illustrated by the woman who becomes drunk with the blood of the saints.

What, then, are we to do about threats to religious freedom? Ellen White says, "It is our duty to do all in our power to avert the threatened danger. We should endeavor to disarm prejudice by placing ourselves in a proper light before the people. We should bring before them the real question at issue, thus interposing the most effectual protest against measures to restrict liberty of conscience" (*Testimonies for the Church* Vol. 5, page 452).

Duties of the Religious Liberty Leader

The ministry to which a person is called when he or she becomes a religious liberty leader can best be described in the following ways:

1. **Promote Liberty magazine.** Your first responsibility as religious liberty leader is to help your pastor conduct the religious liberty campaign in your church. Set an example by your wholehearted support. Then encourage church members to subscribe to Liberty for themselves and give generously to send the magazine to community, state or province, and national officials and thought leaders.

2. **Communication.** Report good and bad news through church newsletters, the church bulletin, and in oral reports during the personal ministries time. Become the eyes and ears for your conference and union Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) directors by bringing significant items to their attention.

3. **Get acquainted with public officials.** Know the state or provincial government leaders and national legislators from your area. Write to them when religious liberty issues arise. Let them know what your religious liberty concerns are in a respectful, dignified manner as befits the cause of Christ. When religious liberty issues arise, you may be asked to encourage church members to write letters to state, provincial, or national leaders, but consult with your conference or union PARL director before writing or contacting public officials in the name of the church.

4. **Give recognition to civic leaders.** When a civic official in your community takes a strong stand on upholding religious liberty, contact your conference or union PARL director for assistance in recognizing the official by presenting an appropriate plaque or award at the church or in the official's office.

5. **Community relations.** Become involved in the local community. Keep a current name and address file of city and county officials, including council members. Get acquainted with your city and county public servants and be sure they receive Liberty magazine. Attend their meetings to become better acquainted with the problems in your community. Keep your pastor and conference or union PARL director informed about major developments in your community that could affect religious freedom. Help to organize local contacts when asked to do so by your pastor or conference or union PARL director.

6. **Help church members.** Watch for religious liberty problems among church members. Some members, especially new ones, are not aware that assistance is available to them as they face Sabbath employment problems or problems with labor unions.

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Religious Liberty

This Quick Start Guide for Religious Liberty is full of important information to help you start or revitalize a ministry at your local church. This guide contains a job description, instructions for getting started, tips for maintaining a successful ministry, troubleshooting suggestions, recommended resources, and more. Whether you're new to this ministry or a seasoned volunteer, this Quick Start Guide will inspire you with lots of great ideas you can immediately put to use in your local church.

Other titles in the Quick Start Guide Series:

- Church Board
- Elder
- Deacon
- Personal Ministries
- Communication

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