

Parent complains when son returns home from school with Bible

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Note from pastor Kevin: It is my hope that this article will inspire Christians to pray for those who are deceived, as this woman is. If only she knew that the Bible contains the love story of how God so loved the world that He sent His son, Jesus, to save those who would believe. Salvation is available to this lady and her son, if only they would believe. Instead, she is keeping this message from her son, and, unless she repents, she will be held accountable for doing so (Matthew 18:4-7).

BELLE FOURCHE, S.D. - The mother of a Belle Fourche Middle School student has complained to the district after her son came home with a Bible that he said had been passed out in the school hallway. "I was out of town. I came home, and it was sitting there in my house," said Bonnie Matthews. "I questioned my son, and he said a man just handed it to him at school."

When she contacted the school, an official said told her the Bible came from the Gideons International organization, which distributes Bibles throughout the world. Matthews said the official told her school policy has allowed such distribution in the past, but that the school itself was not involved and did not sanction it.

That explanation doesn't sit right with Matthews, who says she doesn't believe in organized religion but follows her own spiritual path. "I'm sorry, but giving out Bibles in the hallways of a school is extreme sanctioning to me," Matthews said. "I have a lot of concerns about separation of church and state."

Superintendent Bill O'Dea said a school patron had contacted the district about the issue. But he declined to discuss it further. The school board is scheduled to meet June 9, and could take up the matter then, he said. Past practice has been to allow various groups - religious and otherwise - to provide materials in school but not to hand them out directly, the superintendent said.

Jennifer Ring, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union in North Dakota and South Dakota, said distribution of religious materials in school is a form of free speech and religious freedom. But it should only be done with clear conditions. School officials should not be involved, the school should not promote any religion, and there should not be restrictions on the types of religious beliefs expressed, she said. "The ACLU is a big defender of religious freedom, as long as the regulation isn't one that allows only one religion, as long as it's open to everybody," said Ring.

Belle Fourche businessman Bill Mason said he has no problem with the distribution of Bibles and scriptural readings in school. "This nation was built under God, that's what our forefathers wrote, how many times?" Mason said. "When we get away from God, that's when we start to fall apart." Although he would support groups other than Christians making materials available to schoolchildren, Mason wouldn't support allowing satanic or similar materials. "This is a pretty Christian community. We've got the Latter-day Saints, the independent churches, the Catholics and Methodists," he said. "You know, it's like most small towns in this state."

Danielle Butler, who runs a flower shop in downtown Belle Fourche, said she didn't understand why Matthews was so upset. "If there's a family that doesn't want it,

they can return the Bible," Butler said. "I think the majority of people here belong to a church and go to church regularly."

Matthews said she does not want the word of God forced on her or her family. "I don't feel like a bad guy for approaching this," Matthews said. "I am, in fact, very spiritual, and I like the idea of children becoming open-minded to and learning faith, but from a multitude of directions, not from one."

