

Patrol Confronts Students Over Christian Literature

Officer Tells College Team Missions Work 'Shameful'

Posted: March 30, 2007, 1:00 a.m. Eastern
By Bob Unruh, © 2007 WorldNetDaily.com

An officer with a state police force has confronted a team of college students on a spring break missions trip, telling them that handing out Christian literature is "shameful."



One facility of Frontier School of the Bible

In Pakistan? India? Perhaps Syria? Nope. In Utah. Not only that, but a second officer, this one with a local police force, confronted the same students just a day later, telling them that handing out such information was "looked down on here."

Nelson Koon, of Hudsonville, Mich., and a junior at Frontier School of the Bible in LaGrange, Wyo., led the team of college students on their missions trip, and described for WND how these two incidents happened this week, starting in Payson, Utah.

"We got stopped by a police officer, the group of eight of us in a school vehicle," he said. "He said it was shameful, what we were doing."

The team had volunteered to raise their own funds and spend their spring breaks helping various Christian organizations, including TriGrace Ministries, and others in Utah hand out Christian brochures, and in one case, a DVD called "Jesus Christ/Joseph Smith".

"He said he got one on his door," Koon said of the officer. "He said, 'what were we doing, putting all these lies on the DVD?'"

"He asked us what group or church were we with, ... then he chewed us out a little. He kind of warned us, then he took off," Koon reported.

"This is something absolutely unacceptable," Patrol Public Information Officer Preston Raban of the Utah State Patrol told WND when first contacted.

He later responded that the officer in question had been identified, and admitted letting his "personal feelings" take over. "That's where he became unprofessional," Raban told WND.

Koon said he's long had a heart for the American West, especially the Utah region, and when he graduates in a year from the Wyoming school that focuses on training students for Christian service, he hopes to obtain an internship in Utah to begin his work.

So when a minister from Utah visited the school and described how students could help Utah's churches, he organized the trip. "I thought it would be a good way to get a foot in the door," he said.

Team members had been canvassing towns across the state, not ringing doorbells, but simply hanging handouts on door handles and moving on, he said.

The officer, in uniform and in a state squad car, clearly was upset.

"It was like he felt bad for us, bad for our souls. He thought we were lost," Koon said.

Koon said he didn't want to make any particular organization look bad, and the overall trip was "a great experience."

"We were just going house to house hanging them [handouts and DVDs) on doors with door hangers," he said.

Koon said during the team's preparations, they had reviewed state laws they would need to follow, so felt they were on solid ground, but after the patrolman left, they saw a police station a few blocks up, and decided to stop and make sure.

"[The officer] was hiding on a side street, and he followed us when we drove by," Koon said. "He pulled up and ran into the [police station] before we could get there." A local police officer then came out to talk with the students, and told them they were following the appropriate laws. Koon said the second incident happened to two team members in Springville the next day.

The local municipal officer approached the team members, who were on foot this time, checked their licenses and identifications, and "basically said handing things out was looked down on in Utah," Koon said.

City spokesman Lt. Dave Caron said an officer would have been dispatched if someone complained about door-to-door sales teams. "We have problems," he said. "Some of them [peddlers] that come out have warrants. They have warrants for a reason. They end up going into houses. It's that we have people doing door-to-door and they rip people off." But once assured of the student's plans, there should be no further interaction, he said.

But Koon said the officers took the team members' drivers' licenses, checked them against the record and called for backup so that a second squad car was on the scene, before eventually letting the students continue.

So how soon will Koon and his team members be returning to Utah?

"As soon as possible," he told WND.