



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on March 2, 2012

## “Dearbornistan” Pays Christian Minister \$100,000

A Christian pastor who tried to encourage Muslims to leave Islam will receive \$100,000 in damages from Dearborn, Michigan, which tried to stop him from evangelizing at the city’s Arab-American Festival.

[Dearbornistan](#), as it is known because of its Muslim population, tried to stop [George Saieg](#) from proselytizing among the festival’s Muslim attendees. He sued, as [The New American reported](#) in June, and eventually prevailed in the [U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit](#). At the time, [the court said](#) Saieg was entitled to damages.



Now, he and his attorney will get them.

### The Case

In 2009, Saieg, a Christian of Sudanese descent, revealed to police his plans to seek converts among the Muslim festival-goers. As the [court decision described](#) the case, that’s when his trouble began:

In 2009, Saieg had planned for 90 ACP members to continue the practice of leafleting while roaming the Festival.

However, when Saieg shared these plans with a City police sergeant, Saieg learned that the new Chief of Police, [Chief \[Ron\] Haddad](#), would not permit anyone to distribute leaflets while walking around the Festival. Instead, the City provided the ACP with a booth, waiving the standard fee. The booth was poorly lit and located by carnival rides, which attracted mostly children.

Saieg had good reason, beside the inconvenient location, not to expect Muslims to show up at his booth. Because [Islam’s penalty](#) for apostasy is death, no Muslim contemplating a conversion to Christianity would be seen at the booth. Saieg reasoned that talking to potential converts casually would protect them, making them more likely to converse about the faith.

No matter. The city told Saieg he could not mingle among the Mohammedans to distribute leaflets. Saieg sued. The [Thomas More Law Center provided his attorneys](#). They lost in a lower court, but the Sixth Circuit reversed that decision on appeal, shooting down one of the city’s key arguments: it had to stop Saieg’s leafleting to protect public safety.

One argument the city used was that it the festival was akin to a state fair, which would be permitted to restrict vendors to booths. The court disagreed, citing the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in 1981, [Heffron v. International Society for Krishna Consciousness](#):

First, Festival organizers keep sidewalks that are adjacent to Warren Avenue open for public traffic. In Heffron, attendees paid an admission fee to enter the fairgrounds ... which means that the fairgrounds were closed to members of the public who were not attending the fair. In fact, the Supreme Court expressly distinguished the fairgrounds in Heffron from a public street. ... In contrast, Festival organizers have intentionally maintained the public character of the sidewalks



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that are adjacent to the Festival attractions, keeping those sidewalks open for traffic that is unrelated to the Festival.

The court [also noted](#) that other vendors plied their trade in the same location as Saieg proposed to ply his, which undermined the city's argument that was trying to keep pedestrian traffic circulating smoothly for "public safety."

The defendants admitted at oral argument that leafleters have never posed any problems of public safety or breach of the peace at the Festival that could make leafleters more obtrusive than sidewalk vendors. By permitting the more obstructive sidewalk tables in the same place where Saieg wishes to leaflet by foot, the defendants have undercut the credibility of the asserted government interests.

Importantly, the court [implicitly recognized](#) why Saieg needed the freedom to move on foot about the festival: "Saieg also faces a more basic problem with booth-based evangelism: '[t]he penalty of leaving Islam according to Islamic books is death,' which makes Muslims reluctant to approach a booth that is publicly 'labeled as. . . Christian.' ... Saieg believes that evangelism is more effective when he can roam the Festival and speak to Muslims more discreetly."

Thus did the court [unmuzzle Saieg](#):

On the free speech claim, we REVERSE the district court's grant of summary judgment to the defendants and its denial of summary judgment to the plaintiffs. We thereby invalidate the leafleting restriction within both the inner and outer perimeters of the Festival. The restriction on the sidewalks that are directly adjacent to the Festival attractions does not serve a substantial government interest. The City keeps those same sidewalks open for public traffic and permits sidewalk vendors, whose activity is more obstructive to sidewalk traffic flow than pedestrian leafleting is. Moreover, the prohibition of pedestrian leafleting in the outer perimeter is not narrowly tailored to the goal of isolating inner areas from vehicular traffic [Emphasis in the original].

The police chief's obvious attempt to censor a Christian pastor failed, and cost the city \$100,000.

### **Other Trouble**

But this case of anti-Christian bias in Dearborn is hardly the first. The city's Muslims act harshly toward Christians in other ways.

As [The New American reported](#) in November, the Muslim supervisor of a male nurse, John Benitez, Jr., to stop treating Muslim women who wear the hijab because their men do not think it acceptable. A doctor found out about the medically unwarranted directive and ordered Benitez do his job correctly. The Muslim supervisor fired the nurse.

[According to](#) Benitez' attorney, the clinic admitted that it fired him "not because of any performance problem, but ... because the clinic's conservative male Muslim clientele did not want a male treating female patients."

Nor are schools immune from Mohammed's disciples. Conservative lawyer [Debbie Schlusel sued the city school system](#) and the former principal of [Fordson High](#), a Muslims called Imad Fadlallah, for discriminating against Christians.

[According to](#) Schlusel's complaint, "Though Fordson is a publicly-funded high school, upon taking over as principal at Fordson and throughout his six years at the helm thereafter, Defendant Fadlallah used



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his position to illegally promote Islam, assert organized Islamic religious observances upon students, and to use Islam and Arabic heritage for discriminatory and illegal preferences in hiring, promotions, and disciplinary actions with regard to Fordson employees and teachers.”

As well, [Schlussel’s clients allege](#), Fadlallah “weeded out Christian teachers, coaches, and employees, and has terminated, demoted, or reassigned them because of their Christian beliefs, expressions, and associations, and/or because they are not Muslims or Arabs and/or do not have Muslim beliefs, expressions, and associations.” It continues:

Defendant Fadlallah acts in this manner because Christian and/or non-Muslim beliefs are inconsistent with his personal Muslim beliefs and has imposed and promoted a form of sharia (Islamic religious law) at school activities.

The lawsuit also alleges that the principal “transferred three non-Muslim employees — a school psychologist and two special education teachers — out of Fordson and replaced them with a Muslim social worker and an Arab special education teacher who is married to a Muslim.” Furthermore:

A Christian math teacher, whom Fadlallah wanted out of Fordson, was assigned the worst students behaviorally and academically, in order to drive her out. A Christian teacher’s assistant was harassed by Defendant Fadlallah, until she left Fordson and moved out of state to avoid the stressful situation.

The [lawsuit alleges](#) that Fadlallah wanted to “purge” the school of non-Muslims, and alleges that Fadlallah is tied to the Hezbollah terrorist organization.

So intransigent is the school that, much like the Muslim nursing supervisor who fired a nurse after a doctor countermanded an obviously unprofessional order, it continued its policy despite the lawsuit, firing a teacher after Schlussel filed it.

[Schlussel appealed](#) that decision as well.

*Photo The Arab American National Museum, Dearborn*



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