

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P. O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

August 15, 2011

Richard Davenport, President
Minnesota State University
309 Wigley Administration Center
Mankato, MN 56001

Re: Required Meeting in Evangelical Church

Dear President Davenport:

I am writing on behalf of a concerned faculty member and other members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to objections to a required meeting being held in a church. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 16,600 supporters across the country including more than 400 in Minnesota. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our understanding that Minnesota State University has a required faculty orientation at First Congressional United Church of Christ. It is our understanding that orientations have been held here for the past several years, regardless of other secular locations on campus.

It is grossly inappropriate for an official government meeting to be held in a religious place of worship. This practice forces employees, who may be of varying religions or have none at all, to enter a house of worship. For some, it would conflict with their beliefs to be in the church.

Please understand that some employees will be offended and feel uncomfortable with the church location. Certainly, the location has meaning to some in attendance with its religious significance and symbols. Your campus has several buildings that could serve as suitable meeting places.

We would also like to bring to your attention certain provisions of the Minnesota Statutes relating to fair employment practices. In Minnesota, it is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an individual with respect to the individual's conditions or privileges of employment because of the individual's religion. Minn. Stat. §363A.08(2). If any employees are unable to receive required training by the University because of their religious beliefs, provisions of the Minnesota Statutes relating to discrimination may be implicated.

A church is not an appropriate place to conduct required training for government employees. Minnesota State University must take immediate steps to ensure that no individual is required to attend meetings in a church. Please inform us in writing of the actions you are taking on this matter. We look forward to a reply at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stephanie A. Schmitt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Stephanie A. Schmitt
Staff Attorney