

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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February 18, 2022

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [donald\\_kennedy@charleston.k12.sc.us](mailto:donald_kennedy@charleston.k12.sc.us)**

Donald Kennedy  
Interim Superintendent  
Charleston County School District  
75 Calhoun Street  
Charleston, SC 29401

Re: Religious Endorsement in Middle School Program and Open Records Request

Dear Superintendent Kennedy:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding constitutional concerns over a Christian program being presented to students in the Charleston County School District. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 37,000 members across the country, including members in South Carolina. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It was reported to FFRF that Northwoods Middle School is about to start a program for students that contains Christian lessons and materials. The program is called ARISE, and was created by Angela Henderson, a Christian “prophetic journey coach,” whose Facebook page describes her Christian motivations:<sup>1</sup>

Align your plan with God's plan and overcome any challenge life can throw at you. I help people connect the dots of their life story, see how God has always been at work and discover what He is speaking now and for their future.

The first “session” of the ARISE program includes Christian materials and messages. Students are asked to identify the meaning of the date of their birth; some of the options are: “Singleness of mind; like the mind of Christ, Divine Unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit, Grace, Perfection of God, Distress, given the strength of God during times of spiritual growth...” Students are also asked to identify the month of their birth with similar Christian messages. Please see the attached screenshots.

We write to ensure that the Charleston County School District is not endorsing religion by hosting programs or assigning lessons to students that teach or promote Christianity.

It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion. *See generally, Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). Moreover, “the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/propheticjourneycoach>

choice committed to the private sphere.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2001) (quoting *Lee*, 505 U.S. at 589). Assigning students lessons that include Christian lessons and messages promotes Christianity.

Public schools have a duty to ensure that instructional materials do not promote a particular religious viewpoint. “[T]he discretion of the States and local school boards in matters of education must be exercised in a manner that comports with the transcendent imperatives of the First Amendment.” *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578, 583 (1987) (finding unconstitutional a statute allowing the teaching of creationism, a religious belief, in classrooms). The Supreme Court in *Edwards* recognized that “[f]amilies entrust public schools with the education of their children, but condition their trust on the understanding that the classroom will not purposely be used to advance religious views that may conflict with the private beliefs of the student and his or her family.” *Id.* at 584.

Just as federal courts have routinely ruled that creationist instruction in schools is unconstitutional, religious endorsement presented in school lessons is likewise unconstitutional. The educational value of teaching students that their birth month and date have a special meaning is also incredibly dubious. The use of this program is completely inappropriate and evidences a lack of appreciation for the constitutionally mandated religious neutrality required of a public school district. We ask that the District immediately investigate and ensure that this program and any other programs that don’t comply with the Establishment Clause and have no academic value are not being hosted for students in the District. Please respond in writing, outlining the steps the District will take to fulfill its constitutional obligations, and please respond to the following open record request.

### **Open Records Request**

Pursuant to the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act, I request copies of the following since January 1, 2020:

1. All materials from the ARISE program that the District has or intends to utilize in its classrooms;
2. Any communications to or from District personnel regarding the ARISE program.

If you choose to deny this request, please respond with a written explanation of the denial including any references to applicable statutory exemptions upon which you rely.

If any of these records are available through electronic media, they may be e-mailed to [Chris@ffrf.org](mailto:Chris@ffrf.org). If I can provide any clarification that will help expedite your attention to my request, please contact me at 608-256-8900.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line  
Staff Attorney  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosures

**Now, let's find your day of birth. Write it and the meaning on your treasure map.**

- 1- Singleness of mind; like the mind of Christ
- 2- Witness
- 3- Divine Unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit
- 4- Productive and of the earth; separation
- 5- Grace
- 6- Man
- 7- Perfection of God
- 8- New beginnings; new covenant; success in business
- 9- To finish and accomplish
- 10- Law and order
- 11- Disorder, imperfection, incompleteness
- 12- Government; Authority; Ruling and Reigning
- 13- Rebellion
- 14- Deliverance and release
- 15- New direction
- 16- Unconditional love
- 17- Victory
- 18- Bondage and oppression
- 19- Truth, faith, hearing
- 20- Redemption
- 21- Distress, given the strength of God during times of spiritual growth
- 22- Children of light
- 23- Death and resurrection
- 24- Priesthood
- 25- Grace multiplied
- 26- Righteousness: Making right what as been wrong
- 27- Divinity
- 28- Power
- 29- Trust in redemptions work
- 30- Mourning and sorrow; empowered by hardships
- 31- Empowered with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding

**Let's begin with Months and Their Meanings**  
**Find your birth month and write it and the meaning on your**  
**treasure map.**

**January** – gateway

1st month of modern calendar – unity and singleness of mind  
11th month of Latin calendar – incompleteness; imperfection; disorder

**February** – love, purification

2nd month of modern calendar – witness  
12th month of Latin calendar – divine government

**March** –war

3rd month of modern calendar – divine unity of the Father, Son and Spirit  
1st month of Latin calendar – unity and singleness of mind

**April** – “open doors”

4th month of modern calendar – productive and of the earth; separation  
2nd month of Latin calendar – witness

**May** – “great one”

5th month of modern calendar – grace  
3rd month of Latin calendar – divine unity of the Father, Son and Spirit

**June** – relationships, marriage and well-being

6th month of the modern calendar – of man  
4th month of Latin calendar – productive and of the earth; separation

**July** – “fifth month”/Julius Cesar (leadership)

7th month of modern calendar – perfection of God  
5th month of Latin calendar – grace

**August** – “sixth month”/Caesar Augustus (leadership)

8th month of modern calendar – new beginnings; new covenant; success in  
business  
6th month – of man

**September** – “seventh month”

9th month of modern calendar – to finish and accomplish  
7th month of Latin calendar – perfection of God

**October** – “eighth month”

10th month of modern calendar – law and order  
8th month of Latin calendar – new beginnings, new covenant; success in  
business

**November** – “ninth month,” thankfulness

11th month of modern calendar – incompleteness; imperfection; disorder  
9th month – to finish and accomplish

**December** – “tenth month,” peace

12th month of modern calendar – divine government  
10th month of Latin calendar – law and order