

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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April 14, 2016

**SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:
djohnson@mcpasd.k12.wi.us**

Dr. Don Johnson
Superintendent
Middleton-Cross Plains School District
7106 South Ave.
Middleton, WI 53562

Re: Jesus Lunch

Dear Dr. Johnson:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation regarding the weekly "Jesus Lunch" at Middleton High School. FFRF is a Madison-based national nonprofit organization that works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church. FFRF has more than 23,000 members across the country, with more than 1,300 in Wisconsin, including Middleton members.

Several District parents informed us that a group of adults has threatened to sue the Middleton-Cross Plains School District if the District prevents them from continuing to hold "Jesus Lunch" events at Fireman's Memorial Park, which is directly adjacent to Middleton High School.

We understand these adults hold a weekly lunch event in the park's pavilion. They offer free food to students, proselytize students who attend, and distribute bibles. To our knowledge, this group did not seek or receive the District's permission for any of these activities. In short, these adults are opportunistically luring minors to their event with food in order to promote their personal religious views upon a captive audience of students, all without parental consent.

The City has provided the District a broad lease for non-exclusive use of Fireman's Memorial Park, giving the District "joint control of, and jurisdiction over" the park. The lease gives the District "the right to enforce all or any of [the District's] rules and regulations affecting" District students, including "the right to enforce all or any part of [the District's] rules and regulations" affecting students in the park.

We write to encourage the District to continue its policy of protecting students from these predatory adults. The District should not allow this missionary group

to continue to use property that is under the District's control as a religious recruiting ground during the school day.

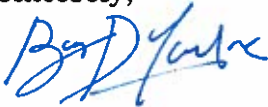
FFRF strongly supports—and actively fights for—the rights to free speech and free assembly embodied in the First Amendment. However, these basic rights have reasonable limits when applied to school campuses. The District is well within its rights to regulate large groups targeting District students, especially when those groups violate District rules and regulations.

With “joint control of, and jurisdiction over” Fireman’s Memorial Park, the District has every right to ensure that large groups meeting in the park abide by school rules during the school day.

Additionally, the City gave the school district jurisdiction over Fireman’s Memorial Park, in part, in order to ensure that District policies aimed at protecting students are not undermined by outside adults’ use of the public park. For example, the District’s lease specifically states that the District’s “more restrictive rules and regulations may include” prohibiting the use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco, even if these are not ordinarily prohibited in city parks. Similarly, failing to require large events in the park to abide by school regulations would place students at risk, particularly when the event openly targets students, attracting them with free refreshments, and is run by unknown outside adults who do not even register as visitors with the school.

As you know, if the District allows this group to give away food to students to promote a religious message, the District may not prevent other groups from holding similar events in the park. FFRF strongly disapproves of the Jesus Lunch parents’ predatory tactics. But if the Jesus Lunch events continue, FFRF will seek to counter their divisive and inappropriate message with our own events, promoting rationalism, state/church separation, and atheism. Likewise, other outside groups may not be barred from similarly taking advantage of this access to students. Public schools should not be religious battlegrounds, and we strongly encourage the District to avoid this scenario by enforcing its reasonable regulations to protect its students from opportunistic religious predators.

Sincerely,



Ryan D. Jayne, Esq.
Diane Uhl Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation