

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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November 30, 2022

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: stevensont@uber.com, macdonalda@uber.com

Troy Stevenson
Vice President & Global Head of Customer
support
1455 Market St, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94103

Andrew Macdonald
Senior Vice President of Mobility
1455 Market St, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94103

Re: Drivers utilizing Uber to advance their ministries

Dear Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Macdonald:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to raise concerns about Uber drivers using your platform to advance their religious mission, to the detriment of your riders. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 39,000 members across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism. We write to formally urge that Uber change its policies to prohibit drivers from forcing their personal religious views upon unsuspecting customers.

It appears that for years, some pastors have been taking advantage of ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft to proselytize unsuspecting riders. A recent article from the Associated Press has detailed multiple drivers who are explicitly exploiting their position at Lyft for the purpose of spreading their religion — e.g., haranguing a captive (and paying) audience with the drivers' personal religious views.¹ There have been similar issues with Uber drivers.² Many riders have questioned these practices and what they should do when it occurs. While Uber suggests that its drivers and riders should “stay away from personal topics that can potentially be divisive,” it appears that Uber does not expressly prohibit evangelism or forced conversations about religion, and this is not a situation that paying customers should be forced to wrestle with.

We recognize that the topic of religion may sometimes come up innocently in casual conversation. That is a far cry from the situation described by the Associated Press and other outlets, involving calculating individuals who drive for ridesharing companies with the explicit intention of targeting riders for missionizing. No one should have to pay to be missionized against their will.

¹<https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/national-international/roving-preachers-lyft-drivers-spread-the-gospel-with-rid-e-hailing-ministries/3965751/>

²<https://spiritualsoundingboard.com/2019/08/10/tony-miano-street-evangelist-has-taken-his-gig-to-uber-and-calls-it-uberevangelism/>

Uber is “committed to creating a safe and welcoming space for everyone, regardless of background,”³ and one of Uber’s guidelines is “treat everyone with respect.”⁴ Non-religious and minority religious riders do not feel safe, welcomed, or respected when they are confronted with proselytizing while stuck in a moving vehicle with a driver preaching at them. Uber does not tolerate discrimination based on religion, but if its drivers are welcome to inquire into and challenge the beliefs of its riders, there is bound to be discrimination and harassment.

Nonreligious or minority religion Uber users should not be made to feel excluded, or like outsiders because an Uber driver is allowed to push personal religious beliefs upon passengers. Currently, about three-in-ten U.S. adults (29 percent) are religious “nones” — people who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular” when asked about their religious identity.⁵ More than a third of the population falls into one of these two categories and that’s a lot of people to offend. Furthermore, many such individuals will feel literally unsafe when they are at the mercy of a driver more interested in converting them or denigrating their nonbeliefs, than in offering them professional transportation. Such ranting is a distraction and potential traffic hazard. Minimally, they may feel they must humor or placate the driver who is disrespecting their views. At worst, they may feel personally threatened or be in jeopardy if they express disagreement.

We request that Uber uphold its commitment to maintaining an inclusive and welcoming community by implementing clear policies prohibiting its drivers from proselytizing, preaching, or otherwise utilizing its services to advance their personal religious viewpoints.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. We would appreciate hearing back from you at your earliest notice about this important matter.

Very truly,



Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-Presidents
Freedom From Religion Foundation

ALG/DB:cal

³<https://www.uber.com/legal/en/document/?country=united-states&lang=en&name=general-community-guidelines>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Gregory A. Smith, About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), available at www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.