

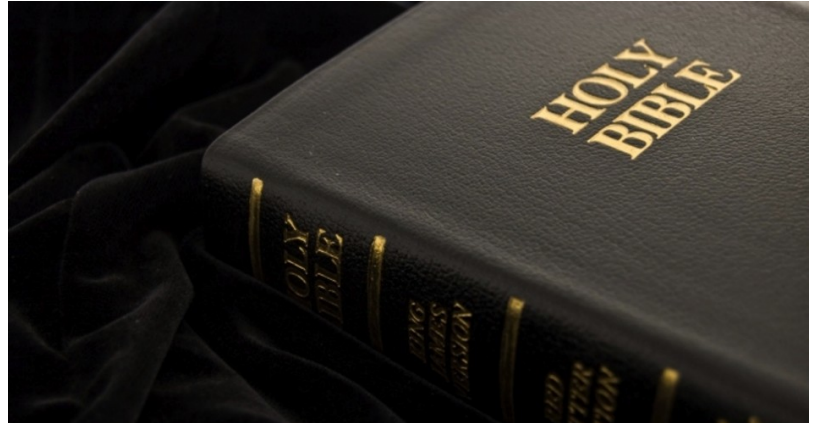


Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 19, 2012

Teacher Reprimanded for Giving Bible to Student

Walter Tutka is in big trouble. The substitute teacher, who has served for years in the Phillipsburg, New Jersey, school district, is facing suspension after school officials learned that he gave a Bible to a student during a lunch hour on October 12.

According to [news reports](#), Tutka was serving at the Phillipsburg Middle School when he remarked to a student who was last in the lunch line that “the first will be last and the last will be first,” quoting from Scripture.



Tutka recalled that the phrase piqued the interest of the student, who asked him about it several times. The teacher said he told the student that while he didn’t know precisely where in the Bible the scripture was located, he would find out and tell him. But after the student inquired the sixth or seventh time, Tutka simply took his personal copy of the New Testament and gave it to the student.

The Phillipsburg-area [Express Times](#) newspaper reported that for his actions, Tutka, a retired electrical company employee, received a letter from the school district’s superintendent, George Chando, recommending a 90-day suspension that would keep Tutka out of the classroom until mid-January of 2013. “The letter states Tutka broke two district policies,” reported the paper. “One prohibits staff from distributing religious literature on school grounds. The other states if religious material is discussed that staff ‘be neutral in their approach and avoid using them to advance or inhibit religion in any way.’”

At a recent school board meeting, local residents spoke out on behalf of Tutka, with one group of supporters noting in a prepared statement that the middle school where Tutka was serving has over one hundred books about religion on its shelves, including such titles as *Bible Stories for Pleasure Reading*, *A Biblical Garden*, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, and *Chicken Soup for the Christian Teenage Soul*. The school district confirmed that the school library also has a copy of the Bible available for students.

Wayne Duryea, one of the men speaking up for Tutka, observed that the school district itself has not always demonstrated neutrality with regard to religion. Duryea told the school board that Tutka “was about as neutral as the district giving a young Muslim student in the high school the ability to change his schedule so he can come to school on a Friday, stay until noon so he is not marked as missing the day ... and then being released so his parents can drive the hour and a half it takes them to reach their mosque so they can fulfill their Friday worship obligations.”

The *Express-Times* noted that Tutka is a member of [Gideons International](#), a Bible organization which [last May had legally distributed New Testaments](#) on the sidewalks outside Phillipsburg’s high school. Tutka was not involved in that event, and said that his gift to the middle school student had nothing to do with his involvement in the Gideons group.

While the district superintendent removed Tutka’s name from the list of available substitute teachers, as of yet the school board has made no decision on what “discipline” it will dispense for his infraction. Board members, however, were adamant that a teacher is not to speak with a student about something as dangerous as Christianity. “We know as a teacher that you are never to cross that line about talking



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about the Bible in school,” said school board member Rosemarie Person. Added school board president Kevin J. DeGerolamo, “You can tell them where to go to reference that quote that you gave without handing them the tool itself.”

As for Tutka, he told the board that “I’d like to continue to substitute teach, but ... that’s your decision, not mine.” He told reporters that ultimately “I know the right thing will be done. I know it will work out for the positive.”



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