



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 16, 2012

Restaurant Owner Fights Atheists Over Dinner Discount for Church Bulletins

It has been a Sunday tradition for many years at restaurants all over America: Bring in a church bulletin and get a discount on Sunday dinner. But a restaurant in Columbia, Pennsylvania, is now under investigation by the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission after a self-identified atheist filed a charge of discrimination against it over its church discount. Pennsylvania's [Lancaster Journal](#) reported that John Wolff, a retired electrical engineer as well as a member of the [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#) (FFRF), filed the charge against Columbia's [Lost Cajun Kitchen](#) (pictured), which offers a 10-percent discount to patrons who bring in a Sunday church bulletin. "I did this not out of spite, but out of a feeling against the prevailing self-righteousness that stems from religion, particularly in Lancaster County," Wolff was quoted by the paper as saying.



Before filing the discrimination grievance, however, Wolff had worked for over a year with the FFRF in an attempt to force the restaurant to bend to his and the atheist organization's will, something the restaurant's owners apparently were unwilling to do. According to an FFRF press release, one of the group's staff attorneys harangued the restaurant's owners, Dave and Sharon Prudhomme, with a total of [three letters of complaint](#) over the discount, but they refused to drop the discount. The attorney, Rebecca Markert, insisted that the discount, offered by thousands of restaurants across the nation for years, "violates the federal Civil Rights Act in addition to provisions of state civil rights statutes." Markert quoted the Civil Rights Act as mandating that "all persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation ... without discrimination on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin." Commented the attorney: "As a place of 'public accommodation,' it is illegal for Lost Cajun Kitchen to discriminate, or show favoritism, on the basis of religion." Having found no way to force the Prudhommies into submission, Wolff took his contrived grievance to the state Human Rights Commission. Shannon Powers, a spokeswoman for the commission, confirmed that Wolff had filed the complaint, explaining that "he is alleging he was offered different service based on his religious creed." Sharon Prudhomme told the *Lancaster Journal* that she has no intention of ceasing the discount, explaining that there is no inherent discrimination because all a patron has to do to get the discount is to drop by a local church or synagogue and pick up a bulletin without attending the service. She added that the discount is merely a way to draw more business to her restaurant on a traditionally slow



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business day. "I think it's a waste to actually give it merit," she said of the complaint.

"Prudhomme said she began offering the discount a little more than a year ago," reported the newspaper. "She said she has offered all kinds of discounts or incentives at various times, including some to senior citizens, early-bird diners, children under 12, people who shop at certain other Columbia businesses, and even Columbia High School students."

Prudhomme told [Fox News](#) that the state appears to be siding with Wolff, with a state representative going as far as suggesting that she and her husband should sign an agreement saying that they would drop the church-bulletin discount and instead offer discounts to any civic organization in town. "I said, 'Wait a minute — you're asking my husband and me to give anybody coming through my door a discount?'" she recounted to Fox News. The state officials said yes, to which Prudhomme responded, "Are you crazy?" She explained that "we have taxes to pay. We have utility bills, payroll, mortgages and they're expecting me to give everyone a discount."

Fox reported that Prudhomme "wondered if their other discounts might be considered discriminatory — like the one on Tuesday night — where kids under 12 get to eat free. Or what about the senior discount? 'Could someone under 65 complain?' she asked."

Prudhomme told the *Lancaster Journal* that, as it stands now, she and her husband are not likely to back down, and, in fact, have availed themselves of legal counsel to fight the discrimination charge. "We have people who say we should do everything they want, and bend over backwards," she said, but added that "I'm an American. This is an independent restaurant. I can do as I wish and I'm going to continue to offer the church-bulletin discount."

According to the [York Daily Record](#), a local newspaper, the Prudhommes' willingness to stand up to the type of intrusion the FFRF and its agent are attempting has actually paid off in increased business for the Lost Cajun Kitchen. "It definitely has picked up," Sharon Prudhomme said. "Everybody that comes in [offers] a lot of handshakes, hugs, everybody is offering a lot of support."

She added that she and her husband have received support from around the nation and world. "We have gotten e-mails, letters, and Facebook contacts from all over the world [and] phone calls like mad from all over the United States," she said. "We even got an e-mail from one of our [soldiers] in Afghanistan supporting us."

The Lost Cajun Kitchen is not the first business to be attacked by secular busybodies intent on sniffing out "discrimination." According to the *Lancaster Journal*, several years ago the ACLU filed a lawsuit against a minor league baseball team, the Hagerstown Suns, when its managers offered a church-bulletin discount to fans. The ACLU backed down when the team agreed to accept bulletins and newsletters from other civic and non-profit groups, in addition to church bulletins.

And more recently, this summer the [Willow Springs Water Park](#) in Little Rock, Arkansas, dropped its \$5 discount for church groups who come to the park on Mondays after a local non-profit that caters to inner-city youth asked for the same consideration. The park's managers "had been knocking a few dollars off the price of admission for people who came to the park with their church group," reported [Fox News](#), charging kids under 15 years of age \$5 instead of the usual \$10. But when Leifel Jackson, executive director of Reaching Our Children and Neighborhoods (ROCAN), asked if he could bring 35 kids to the park and receive the same discount, the park declined.

When a second ROCAN administrator, Jeff Poleet, phoned the Willow Springs Water Park's owner, David Ratliff, to complain about the park's "discrimination," Ratliff made the most businesslike decision he could under the circumstances: he dropped the discount altogether, rather than have a barrage of groups demanding the discount.

Ratliff explained the discount to [ArkansasMatters.com](#), noting that "Monday was our worst day, so we



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offered this to people in the military, over 50, and church groups. It's not a moneymaker. I'm just trying to get people to the park who have never been here. Every time we have a church group we have people who are very well behaved, they expect the most of each other, they are supervised, organized, and it's less expensive to bring them."

He added that "I'm not trying to punish anybody or judge anybody. I'm just trying to run a business and finish up my year."



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