

Testimony HB 1145
House Judiciary Committee
Don Morrison, President of the Board of Trustees
Bismarck Mandan Unitarian Universalist Church
January 14, 2025

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Judiciary Committee, good morning. My name is Don Morrison and I am the president of the Board of Trustees of the Bismarck Mandan Unitarian Universalist Church. I am here to ask you to vote Do Not Pass on House Bill 1145.

The roots of Western thought about religious freedom come from ancient Greece and Rome and the early Christian era that emphasized the importance of individual conscience, reason and the right to choose one's own beliefs and practices. During the centuries of religious wars and religious persecution in Europe, Unitarians were supporters of religious freedom and tolerance of religious differences. The conflict between government imposed religion and religious freedom is not new.

In 1952, the Bismarck-Mandan Unitarian Universalist Church was officially founded in our community and today we are a community where diverse individuals with a variety of beliefs and backgrounds come together to love and support each other.

On a personal level, my ancestors on the Morrison side of the family were Congregationalists who came to this continent in 1639 seeking religious freedom from state imposed religion, which had resulted in centuries of religious wars and violent conflict in Europe. Carrying forward the lessons from experiences with those realities, when the Constitution of the United States of America was adopted in 1787, it included freedom of religion. So, fast forward to today, it seems very odd that now some people in this House are attempting to require the government to impose one certain branch of one religion onto the rest of us. That is a dangerous direction for our state.

The founders of our nation purposefully chose not to have a government-backed religion. Our nation was not founded as a Christian nation. Our nation was not founded on the ten commandments that this bill insists on imposing. The only way the words in this bill could be historical (and not religious) is if they were accompanied with texts from other Christian denominations, and similar moral statements from other religions and perspectives. This bill would impose one narrow Christian view on the people of our state.

We would suggest that we take a deep breath and sit down together. Obviously, there are some ideas in your ten commandments that have broad appeal, and some ideas that do not. We most likely all want our children to be kind, generous, respectful, honest and truthful, to work hard, and, of course, not kill people. Let's listen to each other and use common English to say what we can all agree would support basic goodness in our community.

I grew up in Minot and the Congregational Church was a very important part of my family life. One of my fond memories is time I spent at youth church camp at Lake Metigoshe. I remember the valuable lesson contained in the song we often sang "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love." I believe that is the best way we can find common ground. Let's do that, rather than a law to impose one version of religion.

On behalf of the congregants in my church, I strongly urge you to vote DO NOT PASS on HB 1145. Thank you for listening to my testimony.