

Jews upset by pastor's mail-out aimed at 'saving' them

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Letters that begin "Dear Jewish Friend" have been mailed by a Regina church pastor to people with Semitic-sounding last names so they "might get saved."

Bibleway Baptist Church pastor William Cicansky, who began the church three years ago, said he scoured Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg and Vancouver phone books for "Jewish sounding names" of people to receive his letters.

"We believe it's our mandate to reach people," Cicansky said, adding he targeted Jewish people in particular so "that they might get saved. You see, they (Jews) accept the Old Testament. We (Bibleway Baptists) accept the entire Bible."

Agnostic Earl Goodman said he is furious after receiving the form letter which assumed he was Jewish because of his surname. "I was annoyed enough that if I could've gotten my hands on his (Cicansky's) neck I would've strangled him," said the Saskatoon man whose mother also received the letter. "Both myself and my mother were, to say the least, a little bit pissed off with it."

The letter reads, in part: "We sincerely hope that you are not thinking that we are trying to make you become anything other than Jewish. That is not our purpose."

Dr. Allan Dolovich, president of the Jewish Congregation Shir Chadash in Saskatoon, said he heard about the letter from a woman who, like Goodman, is also not Jewish but received a letter because of her Jewish-sounding last name.

"I really have a problem any time somebody tries to . . . in a pushy way, convince somebody to join their faith," Dolovich said.

"Everyone has a right to speak out about their particular faith and to celebrate their faith but once they start taking a pushy approach and say: 'You've got to be like me,' that's when I've got a problem. I think this letter is starting to move into that area."

Dolovich said the Jewish faith is fine.

"The thing that I find offensive is that they (Cicansky's church) think they are doing us a favour and, the point is, we don't need that favour. We would be offended by anything that suggests that our faith is, in some way, less than what it should be, or substandard, and to me that's the problem with that letter," Dolovich said.

Goodman said he's written a letter to let Cicansky know he's not too happy about the mail-out, which is motivated by what he calls "crass stupidity."

Cicansky said he's not sure how many people with Jewish sounding names received the letters but he has done it in the past and will do it in the future.

"If some people have been offended, we don't want that to happen, obviously. But it's going to happen. Christ offended many people did he not? That's why he was crucified. Correct? So really, the gospel is an offence to some people, but we do it in a kind manner."

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