

Evangelism: Legal Guidelines

Human rights*

All evangelists should know their rights, the rights of others, and the requirement not to discriminate against people on protected grounds or to be discriminated against themselves.

What should evangelists know about the Bill of Rights?

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act applies to government departments, like the police, and other entities exercising public functions, like the local council. The table below lists the main rights relevant for evangelists, what the terms mean, and how rights may be limited by the law.

PROTECTED RIGHT	MEANING	LIMITS ALLOWED BY LAW
Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief	Everyone is free to think and decide for themselves what to believe.	None. But there are limits to the way people are allowed to practise their beliefs.
Freedom of expression	Everyone has the right to express ideas, even if they are unpopular.	There are many limits — for example, speech which encourages violence or causes disorder is a crime, noise levels are regulated, council bylaws may restrict activities like busking, and health and safety concerns can trump free speech. Speech or actions can be restricted if they harass people, take place in protected areas around abortion clinics, or involve certain topics like gender or sexuality conversion. See the guidelines for more examples.
Manifestation of religion	Everyone has the right to exercise their religious beliefs. This includes public expression through worship, teaching and preaching.	Exercising beliefs must not cause a nuisance to others or prevent others from going about their everyday lives. If people don't want to talk to or listen to an evangelist, they are entitled to walk away without being prevented from leaving.
Freedom of peaceful assembly	People are allowed to congregate together and hold meetings, so long as they are peaceful.	Police may intervene to prevent or stop a breach of the peace. Other limits may apply, as above.

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PROTECTED RIGHT	MEANING	LIMITS ALLOWED BY LAW
Freedom from discrimination	Authorities must not treat evangelists differently to other people because of their religious beliefs.	Evangelists cannot be told to leave a public place or denied approval to use public spaces because of religion.

What should evangelists know about the Human Rights Act?

The Human Rights Act protects evangelists from discrimination by private-sector organisations and businesses on grounds including religious belief, ethical belief, and political opinion.

Sometimes discrimination is lawful if there is a good reason, or another law authorises it. The Human Rights Commission can help to resolve complaints about unlawful discrimination.

UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION	EXAMPLES	EXCEPTIONS FOR GOOD REASON
Refusing access to privately owned property that is usually open to the public	Shops, taxis, privately owned public facilities.	Access may be restricted to some people based on health and safety, or specific building regulations such as maximum occupancy limits.
Refusing to sell or hire facilities, or offering them on less favourable terms	Short-term hire of a privately owned hall or conference room.	Less favourable terms and conditions may be imposed where necessary to protect health and safety, or a bond may be required to mitigate damage.
Denying the right to occupy land, or offering occupation on less favourable terms	Long-term leases and rentals.	Less favourable terms and conditions may be imposed where reasonably necessary to protect health and safety or manage risk.
Refusals that look neutral but discriminate in practice	Employment requirements that effectively exclude a whole group of people.	Genuine need for different treatment, which will be suitable and reasonably necessary to meet that need.

This information sheet summarises material in [Evangelism: Legal Guidelines](#), a resource to inform evangelists about the laws likely to affect public ministry. If this topic is relevant to your ministry, we recommend reading the relevant section in the full guidelines.

If you are involved in evangelism and have a question that our guidelines don't answer, feel free to get in touch by emailing contact@ethosalliance.nz.