

Jehovah's Witnesses booth raising eyebrows at Toronto book fair

Representatives giving away free religious literature to French-speaking students

By Devin Heroux, [CBC News](#) Posted: Dec 03, 2016 5:00 AM ET Last Updated: Dec 03, 2016 5:00 AM ET

Students attending the 24th annual Salon du Livre de Toronto book fair are getting the chance to pick out their favourite novels, but they're also being exposed to free literature from the Jehovah's Witnesses.

For the fourth consecutive year, the organizers of the book fair have allowed the Jehovah's Witnesses to have a booth.

But this year, people are raising concerns about a religious group being at the book fair, which is being held at the Toronto Reference Library on Yonge Street north of Bloor Street.

"Someone asked me why Jehovah Witness? I answered, why not Jehovah Witness," the chair of the book fair, Valery Vlad, said.

But some people who were at the fair Thursday disagreed with Vlad.

'It's very bizarre'

It's very bizarre. It doesn't go with a book fair," Alexandre Garneau told Radio-Canada reporter Mathieu Simard in French.

"It's not really the place for it. I think religion should be in the home or at church," said author Viateur Lefrançois, who also spoke to Simard in French.

The book fair runs until Saturday and Vlad told CBC Toronto the religious group is here for the remainder of the event.

However, he said people at the Jehovah's Witnesses booth are not allowed to actively encourage students to take a book; students have to ask to receive the free literature, instead.

"They stay at the booths and don't have the right to offer you a book, for example," Vlad said.

"From a school board perspective we have to talk to the parents and let them know that it's possible their child might come home with a book they might not be in favour of because of their own faith," said Conseil scolaire Viamonde director of communications and marketing Claire Francoeur.

Case-by-case situation

Francoeur said she's called all the principals with the board, asking them if students have picked up a Jehovah's Witnesses book and that they'll be dealing with each student on a case-by-case situation.

"It's not the way that we're doing it," said Francoeur. "Usually there's always an adult beside them to explain what is what and how things are and make sure they understand the difference between different faiths."

As a public school board, Francoeur said they don't shy away from discussing different religions. She does have concerns however that some younger students might not be aware of what type of book they're picking up for free.

"If the students do have the book we'll explain to them what the faith is and what the difference is between other faiths."

About 7,000 students will attend during the four-day book fair. Throughout the event students have the chance to pick out some of their favourite novels and talk with authors.

Vlad said he also hopes that students start thinking about books as gifts. In some cases, though, Vlad said he has seen students wrapping up Jehovah Witness books for their parents.

"For me, it's necessary to give a booth to every group who wants to present books, religion or not."

The book fair board of directors is expected to decide in January whether or not the religious group will be allowed back next year.

"Personally, I'd say yes. I'd allow them. But it's not me who decides but the board," Vlad said.

But Francoeur isn't so sure.

"I doubt they will continue to have one, because the book fair people told me they had a lot of questions. Not from us, but other people," she said.

Explore CBC

[CBC Home](#)

[TV](#)

[Radio](#)

[News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Music](#)

[Arts](#)

[Kids](#)

[Local](#)

[Documentaries](#)

[Comedy](#)

[Books](#)

[Parents](#)

[Indigenous](#)

[Digital Archives](#)

[Games](#)

[Contests](#)

[Site Map](#)

Stay Connected

[Apps](#)

[RSS](#)

[Podcasts](#)

[Newsletters & Alerts](#)

Services and Information

[Corporate Info](#)

[Public Appearances](#)

[Commercial Services](#)

[Reuse & Permission](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[CBC Shop](#)

[Help](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Jobs](#)

[Doing Business with Us](#)

[Renting Facilities](#)

CBC  **Radio-Canada**

©2016 CBC/Radio-Canada. All rights reserved

Visitez Radio-Canada.ca