

# ADDRESSING AGGRESSIVE RELIGIOUS RECRUITING\*

Spiritual Care and  
Multi-Faith Centre |



While at the University of Manitoba, you may want to find a group to make meaningful connections and to explore the big questions of life: “Who am I?” & “Why am I here?” You could choose to explore a religious tradition or philosophy by joining a religious group or university club. Most students have positive experiences with faith-based groups recognized by the University of Manitoba. However, you should be aware that high-pressure, aggressive religious groups do exist, and you may be approached by a member of one of these groups.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF AGGRESSIVE RELIGIOUS GROUPS

**Pressure and deception:** using highpressure recruitment tactics and not being up-front about their motives.

- Do they offer instant friendship and intimacy?
- Will they not take ‘no’ for an answer; invitations are impossible to refuse without feeling guilty and/or ungrateful?
- Were you warned of serious spiritual or physical repercussions for not conforming to group doctrines or beliefs?
- Is the group reluctant to accept you as you are? Do you feel a pressure to change?
- Do they feel that it is proper to deceive people for the sake of the group?

**Totalitarian world-view:** not encouraging critical and independent thinking and claiming to possess the truth exclusively.

- Does the group seem too perfect?
- Do the people all agree and accept all orders cheerfully?
- Do they claim to have ‘all the answers’ to your problems?
- Is it unacceptable to have doubts about what the group teaches or does?
- Are doubts and questions taken as signs of weakness for which you will be punished?

**Alienation:** encouraging you to sever ties with others who are not members of their group.

- Does the group say that your parents and friends cannot understand or help you with religious matters?
- Does the group view all aspects of

your former life as bad? Do they use information about your former lifestyle to blackmail you into staying?

- Are you uncomfortable with the group’s attitude towards women or a particular racial, ethnic or religious group?

**Exploitation:** making unrealistic demands on your time and/or money and not understanding that your studies are your first priority.

- In the group, do you find yourself without enough private time? Nourishment? Sleep?
- Does the group encourage you to put their meetings before all other commitments, including studying?

## YOU ARE MOST VULNERABLE TO AGGRESSIVE RELIGIOUS GROUPS WHEN:

### You’re lonely

- You’re away from home, new to Winnipeg or Canada and you’re homesick for familiar friends and places

### You’re hurting

- You’ve had a disagreement with your family or close friend
- You’ve suffered a loss
- You’re experiencing stress
- You’re having a “faith crisis”

### You’re having a difficult time socially

- You haven’t made any good friends in Winnipeg
- You don’t know how to become part of the university community
- You’re stuck in a dull routine of class, dinner, homework, bed, repeat

### You aren’t doing well academically

- You’re under pressure to do well

- You feel like a failure because your grades are lower than what you expected

## WHEN FINDING A GROUP TO CONNECT WITH, MAKE SURE THAT THEY:

- Encourage relationships with family and friends outside the group.
- Help you through some of life’s inevitable crises.
- Invite open and thoughtful investigation of beliefs and welcomes a critical approach to faith.
- Encourage you to be a responsible and contributing member of the larger community.
- Offer a reasonable and credible belief system upon which to structure your life.

## NEED HELP?

The purpose of Spiritual Care is to support the spiritual well-being of students and to increase our understanding of and respect for religious beliefs and practices. If you’ve been in contact with an aggressive religious or other high pressure group, or if you just want some help, here’s what you can do:

### Contact the Spiritual Care and Multi-faith Centre

If you are made to feel unsafe or have any questions about a particular faith group or organization on campus, please contact our office. We can help connect you with a faith community.

204-474-8721

[SpiritualCare@umanitoba.ca](mailto:SpiritualCare@umanitoba.ca)

*\* Adapted and used with permission from the University of Calgary.*