

Gideons prohibited from distributing Bibles

(Continued from page 19)

Shirk believes Bible distribution in high schools could help to save some teenagers from suicide or despair, and could serve to strengthen their moral values. "We hate to have to wait and give them their first testimony when they're in prison," he said.

Nonetheless, a 3rd Amendment requirement for the separation of church and state prohibits religious groups from access to public property, said Community Lawyer Chastene LaViole yesterday. That means that groups like Gideons International are not allowed by law to go forward with plans like the one proposed for Gilbert School.

LaViole added that in 1991, a decision from the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, which serves New York, Connecticut, and

Vermont, affirmed public schools are not the equivalent of ordinary public forums, where groups are allowed to distribute literature as they choose.

Gilbert School, which functions in part on a private endowment, was long considered only a partially public institution by the community, which has given rise to questions about whether the Gideons might be able to bypass laws governing public property and be allowed access to the school.

However, Sullivan explained Gilbert is recognized under Connecticut statutes as full-fledged public high school, despite a private endowment, and does not have the discretionary privileges of a private school.

The Gideons also distributed 450 Bibles at Northwestern Connecti-

cut Community College this week, according to Shirk.

NCCC Dean of Administration Thomas E. Anderson said the Gideons were restricted to sidewalks outside the college property. "Our policy with them has generally been they can't go in private buildings. . . . But they have as much right as anybody else to the public walkways," he said.

Anderson said the Gideons have

distributed Bibles once a year around the college for about the past ten years, but generally fail to arouse much interest in the students. "Generally, they might accept the book—I've never really seen them stop and chat," with the Gideons, he said.