

# CHURCH-STATE ISSUES SURROUND GRADUATIONS

Every year there is some sort of controversy regarding religion at high school graduations. Whether it be a valedictorian prayer or a graduation ceremony held in a church, the separation of church and state crowd always seem to have something to gripe about. This year was no different.

In Greenwood, Indiana students at Greenwood High School voted to have a prayer recited at the graduation ceremony, but the class valedictorian opposed the vote. With the help of the ACLU of Indiana, the student filed a lawsuit claiming that the vote violated the separation of church and state. Eventually, the U.S. district judge presiding over the case ruled that the prayer did indeed violate the First Amendment. Despite the ruling, the graduating class' president thanked God during her speech to a roar of applause.

The ACLU of Montana asked the Board of Regents at Montana State University (MSU)-Northern to apologize for the prayers that were offered during the school's graduation. Once again the prayers were viewed as a violation of separation of church and state. By allowing the prayer, the ACLU said that MSU-Northern had "a lack of respect for its students, faculty and staff...."

In California, Exeter Union High School buckled to the pressure applied by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Anti-Defamation League and the Freedom From Religion Foundation by not allowing a student vote on whether or not to have a prayer at graduation. Instead of a prayer the school officials held a moment of silence.

The school district in New Haven, Connecticut handed graduating students their diplomas, without the phrase "year

of our Lord” on the document. The superintendent said that the phrase was removed so as to not offend anyone. When asked to address this issue, Bill Donohue said: “It is unconscionable. Attempts to scrub clean any reference to our founding is a disservice to the students and their community. And to base this decision, in part, on the need not to ‘offend anyone,’ is disingenuous—it offends beyond belief the vast majority of Americans. This is political correctness gone mad.”

The strangest case came from Enfield, Connecticut. After a U.S. district judge ruled that a graduation ceremony at a local mega-church would violate the First Amendment, the board of education voted to appeal the ruling; the appellate court will hear the case next year. What made this so strange was that you had a public institution fighting to have its ceremony in a church following the ruling from a federal judge declaring it unconstitutional.

It will be interesting to see how this case pans out. One thing is for certain: you can bet that the Catholic League will be following it closely.