

Education



January 28

Dupo, IL—The Dupo School Board voted to reinstate Dupo High School student James Lord, who was suspended from the school's closed circuit broadcast television for signing off his December 17, 2003 broadcast by saying, "Have a safe and happy holiday and God Bless."

February 5

Kirtland, OH—Dr. James Tuttle, professor of moral philosophy at Lakeland Community College, was removed from teaching classes and threatened with dismissal for stating that he was a Catholic on his course syllabi. In March 2003, a student had complained that Tuttle mentioned his Catholic faith too often in class. In response, Tuttle stated on his syllabi that he was "a committed Catholic Christian philosopher and theologian." He encouraged any student who felt uncomfortable to speak with him. In April 2003, Tuttle received a letter from Dean James L. Brown who wrote that he was "more bothered by [Tuttle's] disclaimer than by anything I read in [the student's] complaint." Tuttle's course load was then reduced. He refused to take the last pick of the classes, which contradicted his seniority status, resulting in him having no classes to teach.

March

Hyattsville, MD—Officials at Hyattsville Middle School prohibited students from wearing rosaries. A memo to parents said, "In our training about gangs, we have been informed that wearing rosaries as jewelry often is a gang symbol." It added, "Our country is built on the premise of the separation of church and state. Therefore, we are asking that our students refrain from wearing rosaries or other items such as bandanas that might be associated with gangs."

William Donohue wrote a letter to the CEO of Prince George's County Public Schools, Dr. André J. Hornsby. He said, "There are several problems here, including constitutional ones. As I've indicated, there is nothing wrong with a school that decides to ban religious symbols that are being worn for the purpose of conveying a gang message (as opposed to religious expression). But when separation of church and state is invoked, it suggests that all religious symbols are prohibited. Would this mean that Christians cannot wear a cross, and that Jews cannot wear a Star of David? And why, if the First Amendment provision regarding church and state is being invoked, does it make sense to lump rosaries (a religious symbol) with bandanas (a secular symbol)....Go ahead and ban religious symbols that are being abused by gangs to get their message across, but don't condition this edict on the grounds of separation of church and state. That is casting the net too wide, needlessly making this an issue of constitutional law." A school official contacted Donohue saying that an apology to parents was given by the principal and a series of steps were taken to assure that nothing like this ever happens again.

March 30

Freeport, NY—The 2003-2004 calendar of the Freeport School District noted religious holidays such as Yom Kippur, but made no mention of Christmas. It noted a Sunday holiday, Mother's Day, but not another Sunday holiday, Easter. After the Superintendent of Schools was contacted, the committee that creates the calendar moved to include Christmas and Easter in the 2004-2005 calendar.

August 18

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) accused a Christian fraternity, Alpha Iota Omega, of discrimination against non-Christians because the fraternity did not allow non-Christians to be members. The fraternity refused to sign a "nondiscrimination" clause that would forbid it from

considering religion when determining membership in the group. Alpha Iota Omega sued UNC over the issue.

August 27

Moline, IL—Bruce LeBlanc, sociology professor at Black Hawk College and a former Catholic priest and admitted homosexual, was known for his practice of graphically describing homosexual acts in the classroom and for his habit of mocking Christian beliefs. In Spring 2003, a student claimed he was harassed by LeBlanc for being a conservative and a Christian. He reported that LeBlanc wrote “F— God” on the blackboard.

After an advisory committee said he violated the school’s harassment policy, the faculty of the college defended LeBlanc on free speech grounds. Though LeBlanc was not penalized in any way, the fact that the committee recommended he apologize to the offended student led him to challenge the decision through the school’s collective bargaining agreement.

September 9

In a debate on Beliefnet.com between Ronald M. Green, chairman of the department of religion at Dartmouth, and Nigel Cameron, research professor of bioethics at Chicago-Kent College of Law, Green made several anti-Catholic remarks while defending abortion and embryonic stem cell research. He questioned the propriety of Catholics even entering this discussion. Everywhere in Europe, he contended, was the presence of the Catholic Church: he admitted that France was mostly secular but, he said, there was “a determined and well-placed minority of devout churchgoing Catholics” that was still active.

In response, Cameron opined that “someone has been reading *The Da Vinci Code*.” He also accused Green of promoting a conspiratorial view and even wondered aloud why Green would challenge the role of religious organizations in the bioethical debate, especially given the fact that Beliefnet was hosting the debate. “In fact,” Cameron noted, “Green rants against the influence of religious people who think democracy

gives them rights and responsibilities in public affairs.”

October 5

Ann Arbor, MI—A federal judge ordered the Ann Arbor School District to pay \$102,000 in attorney fees and costs to the Thomas More Law Center because school officials had prevented a student from expressing her Catholic viewpoint against homosexuality during a “Diversity Week” program. In 2002, the student was prevented from participating in a “Homosexuality and Religion” panel because the school said her views were “negative.” The judge, Gerald Rosen, wrote that “This case presents the ironic, and unfortunate, paradox of a public school celebrating ‘diversity’ by refusing to permit the presentation to students of an ‘unwelcome’ viewpoint on the topic of homosexuality and religion.”

November

Newfields, NH—The principal of Newfields Elementary School defended the school’s Christmas ban, saying, “For some time now we’ve tried to distance ourselves from religion and world events.” He concluded, “It’s important schools are all things to all people or none to any.”

November

Charlotte, NC—At a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools meeting, Rose Hamid, the head of a group called Muslim Women of the Carolinas, successfully censored “Silent Night” from the schools. “Joy to the World” was also banned. The principal of Smithfield Elementary School—a Baptist pastor—told those assembled that he had changed the focus of his school’s annual program from Christmas to winter.

November

Scarborough, ME—Parents who met throughout the fall with Scarborough School District administrators said the suppression of Christmas had become so intense, it’s being referred to as the “C-word.” The situation persisted in spite of an official district policy stating that schools should not

ignore religion.

November 15

Maplewood, NJ—The local school district banned student bands from performing songs with references to Christmas or Santa Claus—even instrumental versions. A statement from school board president Brian O’Leary said the purpose of the ban was “to balance the important roles that religion and music can and do play in our curriculum with a desire to avoid celebrating or appearing to celebrate a religious holiday.”

November 17

New York, NY—Barnard College Religion Professor Celia M. Deutsch told a Student Government Association forum that there is “a lot of prejudice” on campus, specifically anti-Catholic sentiment. “I hear students say they are afraid to say they are Catholic,” Deutsch said, “because there is a whole set of associations [attributed with being Catholic].”

November 17

Budd Lake, NJ—Kathy Cogan’s one-woman show, “Vatican II: What the Hell Happened?”, premiered at the Pax Amicus Castle Theatre. Cogan mocked the Sacrament of Penance, Holy Communion, marriage preparation programs, and other Catholic practices.

November 22

Garwood, NJ—A student wrote a poem about Thanksgiving that said, “Pilgrims thank God for what they were given.” The poem was displayed, but the school authorities excised “God” from it. After the student’s mother complained, the school put the word back.

November 22

Cupertino, CA—Public school teacher Steven Williams sued his school district and principal for banning him from using the Declaration of Independence, the writings of George Washington, and other documents from the Founding Fathers

because of their references to God and Christianity. Stevens Creek School principal Patricia Vidmar had reportedly ordered Williams—but no other teachers—to submit all teaching materials in advance for review. The suit charged that Williams' equal protection rights under the Constitution were violated.

November 23

Annapolis, MD—Public school teachers in the state were required to teach about the Thanksgiving holiday without mentioning religion. On the Pilgrims, an administrator said, "We mention they were Puritan but students usually just understand that they had a belief system and not much more than that."

December

Epping, NH—The principal of Epping Elementary School boasted that "We do a fund-raiser for families in need, but we don't call it a Christmas gift drive" because "It's a time for giving and that's pretty much universal." He failed to explain, however, just why December should be chosen as a time of giving.

December

Birmingham, AL—The University of Alabama's Office of Cultural Diversity recommended that all nativity scenes be banned because they are "religion-focused." But it said that the menorah—a Jewish religious symbol—is "fine" because it is really a "secular" symbol. University employees were instructed to "Avoid confronting others from different religions about their beliefs." The purpose of the guidelines were to avoid "unintentional oppression or hostilities."

December

Staten Island, NY—The official calendar of Tottenville High School noted as "Dates to Remember" Hanukkah on Dec. 8 and Kwanzaa on Dec. 26—but made no mention of Christmas. The school's guidelines for the display of cultural/holiday

symbols said: "The display of secular holiday symbol decorations is permitted. Such symbols include, but are not limited to, Christmas trees, Menorahs, and the Star and Crescent."

December

Scottsdale, AZ—At CASY Country Day charter school, students were told that "Joy to the World" and similar songs were taboo. The school's music teacher, Diane Spero, explained, "we don't do religious songs at all." Ruth Argabright, a music specialist in the Mesa Unified School District, remarked that "we've tried to be more inclusive as our world opens to us."

December

Plainfield, IL—Central School listed the song "I Hate This Holiday" in its holiday concert program, a parody from the choral "Frosty's First Adventure." Bus driver Carmen Brown took it as an insult to Christians and called for a boycott of the concert. School principal Linda DeLeo conceded that the song was offensive and justified it by saying, "We have Jewish children, we have children who celebrated Ramadan a couple of weeks ago. We take into account that we aren't all celebrating the same holiday and try to put on programs that everyone can celebrate."

December

Sacramento, CA—Three first-grade teachers were ordered by a superior not to let the word "Christmas" slip from their lips.

December

Yonkers, NY—A school superintendent reversed a limitation on holiday ornaments and lesson plans after the Thomas More Law Center filed suit against the school district for discriminating against Christians.

December

McHenry County, IL—Pupils at Spring Grove Elementary School managed to sing holiday songs at a celebration without

mentioning Christ or the Christmas story. The banning of Christian references prompted the Alliance Defense Fund to send letters to 350 school district superintendents in the Chicago area informing them that legal precedents “allow and sometimes require officials to permit religious expression in public schools.”

December

East Manatee, FL—Even snowmen were banned from display at Freedom Elementary School, whereas the school used to exhibit crèches. Only patriotic songs were permitted at the school’s “winter concert.” Nearby, at Braden River Middle School in East Manatee County, new guidelines banned “celebrating” the holidays; they could only be “recognized.” Braden’s principal said, “You won’t see any Christmas trees around here.” He added, “We keep it generic.”

December 8

Gurnee, IL—Superintendent Dennis Conti’s ban against Christmas music on school buses was voted down following a protest by parents at a packed meeting of the Woodland School District board. They treated the assembled school officials to an impromptu rendition of “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.”

December 9

Mustang, OK—Residents formed a living nativity scene across from Lakehoma Elementary School to protest the banning of the nativity scene and “Silent Night” from the school’s annual Christmas play; the same school kept a menorah and other non-Christian religious symbols in the performance.

December 13

Egg Harbor, NJ—Egg Harbor Township Board of Education issued a ban on “Silent Night” from the public school’s Holiday Singalong. But it did not ban the Hanukkah tune “The Dreidel Song” or the song “Kwanzaa’s Here.” After Christians protested, the Board voted 7-to-0 to reverse its earlier decision and “Silent Night” was returned to the program.

December 13

West Bend, WI—The West Bend Joint School District reversed its policy forbidding students to hand out Christmas cards containing the religious origins of the candy cane.

December 14

Mustang, OK—When a public school principal banned fifth-graders from acting out the nativity in a school pageant—but kept symbols of Kwanzaa and Hanukkah—voters retaliated by voting down two bond measures for local schools totaling nearly \$11 million. It was the first time in over a decade that Mustang voters denied their school district additional funds.

December 15

Plano, TX—Parents and children sued the Plano Independent School District for the pervasive religious hostility of its anti-Christmas policies. The school district's policy included a ban on red and green decorations, on giving out candy canes when a religious card is attached, and on parents giving one another religious items on school property. The U.S. Department of Justice launched an investigation of the school district.

December 17

Kirkland, WA—A long-scheduled performance of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" was cancelled by the principal because, he said, "Teaching about religious holidays is permissible, but celebrating them is not."

December 19

Worcester, MA—In a story contending that the city "is not following a national trend to take religion out of the December holiday season," the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* cited the presence of "Santa Claus, a Christian symbol" at the city hall Christmas tree lighting. Mayor Timothy P. Murray said, "I don't favor generic greetings" and called the Christmas season "a time to celebrate our inclusion and

diversity by honoring all the religions.” Yet Worcester public schools continued a policy of banning nativity scenes.

December 22

Del Mar, CA—Del Mar Union School District “[cracked] down on religious Christmas symbols,” according to the Los Angeles Times. Christmas trees were banned, Santa Claus was classified as a religious symbol, “Silent Night” was forbidden, and Christmas programs were reclassified as “Winterfest” celebrations.