

FEDERAL APPEALS COURT AFFIRMS STUDENT PRAYER

A federal appeals court today has again ruled that public school students have the right to choose a fellow classmate to give a prayer at a high school graduation; the case involves Duval County in Florida. The ruling makes it clear that school officials have no control over the selection of who is to speak or what the speaker says. Last June, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that student-led prayers at public school football games in Santa Fe, Texas, were unconstitutional because they were officially sanctioned. But as far as the 11th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals is concerned, the Florida and Texas cases are “fundamentally different.”

Catholic League president William Donohue today explained the league’s position:

“Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected student-led prayers before a public high school football game because it reflected the official policy of a school district. The policy not only allowed students to vote in favor of a prayer before the games, it provided measures to supervise the vote. The result of all this, the high court ruled, was to effectively put the school district on record as endorsing religion. But the situation in the Florida case is different because it is more of a straight free speech issue. No doubt this decision will be appealed.

“It is the position of the Catholic League that religious speech should not be granted a second-class status by the state. It is well known that the same radical civil libertarian and separation of church and state extremists who maintain that it is constitutionally protected speech to allow a student to use obscenities in a valedictorian address are the same ones howling for censorship whenever a prayer is

cited in public. They want to deny students the right to invoke the name of God at a graduation ceremony but would defend to the hilt the right of students to curse God before the same crowd. That, they would say, is free speech. It is our hope that such intellectual dishonesty will not be ratified by the courts."