

# Government



## February 18

**New York, NY**—U.S. District Court Judge Charles Sifton ruled against the plaintiffs in the discrimination suit challenging the New York City Department of Education's policy regarding "Holiday Displays." The policy allowed the Jewish menorah and Islamic star and crescent while banning the Christian symbol, the nativity scene. The Catholic League arranged for the Thomas More Law Center to file the suit in December 2002 on behalf of a Queens, New York mother and her two children.

Sifton ruled that the policy is not unconstitutional and does not discriminate against Christians. In his decision, he wrote that the policy is secular in intent—the menorah and the star and crescent have a secular dimension, while the nativity scene is "purely religious." Elsewhere, he wrote that the holiday displays "must be reviewed as perceived by the children, Christian children in particular, but not one hypersensitive Catholic child." The Catholic League said the ruling smacked of anti-Catholic bias.

## June 14

The Catholic League broke a news story on the hiring of Mara Vanderslice by the Kerry campaign as its new Director of Religion Outreach. Her resume was startling: she was an extreme radical who belonged to Marxist clubs in college; after college she spoke at rallies organized by anti-Catholic groups; she took to the streets of Seattle in a protest against the World Trade Organization; and she was arrested for trying to shut down Washington, D.C. and the World Bank. Four days after we exposed her in a news release, the Kerry camp put the muzzle on her, forbidding her to speak to the media.

## July 19

**Genesee County, MI**—The ACLU filed a suit on behalf of appellant Joseph Hanas. Hanas, a Catholic, alleged that he was coerced into practicing Pentecostalism at the Inner City Christian Outreach (ICCO) rehabilitation center. The counselors and pastor running it called Catholicism “witchcraft,” confiscated Hanas’ rosary and Bible, prevented a priest and deacon from visiting him, and forced him to attend Pentecostal Bible studies and services. There was no actual drug treatment activity in the program, and successful completion of the program required (among other things) proclaiming oneself “saved.”

When Hanas requested a transfer out of ICCO into a secular program, Genesee County Judge Robert M. Ransom removed him from deferred sentencing, accepted his guilty plea, convicted and sentenced him. Had he remained in the deferred sentencing program, no conviction would have appeared on his record. The ACLU’s brief argued that the choice facing Hanas constituted a violation of the Michigan and federal Free Exercise Clauses: he could remain at ICCO, and be coerced into practicing Pentecostalism and discouraged from practicing Catholicism, or he could face criminal sanctions.

## **July 23**

**Washington, DC**—Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Terry McAuliffe announced the appointment of Rev. Brenda Bartella Peterson as the first-ever Senior Advisor for Religious Outreach to the DNC. On Monday, August 2, the Catholic League issued a press release noting she signed an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in support of atheist Michael Newdow in his attempt to get the words “under God” stricken from the Pledge of Allegiance. Two more news releases on Peterson were issued on August 3 and 4. She then resigned her position on August 4, saying she couldn’t take the pressure any more. She was not replaced and the DNC let the position expire.

## **November 1**

**New York, NY**—In *New York* magazine, Rep. Charles Rangel, Democratic congressman for Harlem, reacted to Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput's statement that voting for an explicitly pro-abortion candidate was "cooperating in evil." Rangel said, "I don't know if priests go to confession. I just wonder whether priests confess to each other what they're doing to our children. They ought to put a district attorney in some of these confessional boxes."

### **November 15**

**La Grange, KY**—Town officials decided not to display a nativity scene on the courthouse lawn. The scene had been displayed for 14 years. The reason given was that they feared a lawsuit from the ACLU.

### **November 23**

**Demarest, NJ**—After 150 angry residents arrived at a borough council meeting, council members voted unanimously to scrap a planned vote to remove religious symbols from the borough's village green.

### **December**

**Somerville, MA**—Mayor Joseph Curtatone publicly expressed regret for calling Somerville's "holiday party" a Christmas Party. "I apologize for the mistake," Curtatone said, "and to anyone who was offended by it."

### **December**

**Chapel Hill, NC**—The town sponsored "a series of holiday events," including a "Holiday Parade" and "a Community Sing and Tree Lighting." But no mention was made of what the holiday actually was.

### **December**

**Tallahassee, FL**—State Democratic legislators reportedly balked at Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Daniel Webster's plans to recommend repeal of the state constitution's 1885 anti-Catholic-motivated "Blaine Amendment," which prevents public

monies from helping religious schools and other institutions.

## **December 2**

**Denver, CO**—After hundreds of angry phone calls, Mayor John Hickenlooper reversed a plan to replace the “Merry Christmas” sign outside City Hall with one that said “Happy Holidays.” He said, “Hickenlooper might have two O’s, but I am not Scrooge.” The city has also maintained a manger scene on the City Hall steps since the early 1940s, despite protests in recent years from militant atheist organizations.

**The ad below appeared on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* on September 20.**

## CENSORING RELIGIOUS SPEECH

It is no secret that many of our cultural elites harbor an animus against religion. What they desire is for people of faith, of every religion, to recede from public life. Not content to disagree with practicing Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims and others, they seek to silence them. Whether the issue is movies they detest, e.g., "The Passion of the Christ," or words they abhor, e.g., "under God," their natural impulse is to censor.

Because this is an election year, the censors have targeted clerics and religious organizations. They seek to silence them by appealing to a metaphor, written by Jefferson, about separation of church and state. Jefferson, however, said that it was a "lie" attributed to him by his foes that he wanted a "government without religion."

It is also a lie to say that today's foes of religion are principled: they said nothing when former President Bill Clinton recently spoke from the pulpit at New York's Riverside Church imploring the faithful to remember that "Politics and political involvement dictated by faith is not the exclusive province of the right wing." But isn't it the left wing that has objected the most to any "politics dictated by faith"?

This election season, the censors have their sights set on Catholic bishops, especially those who threaten sanctions against Catholic pro-abortion politicians. While abortion is a public issue, disciplinary measures are an internal matter. To be plain, no non-Catholic has any business lecturing Catholic bishops on the house rules of the Catholic Church. If the bishops were threatening sanctions against racists or anti-Semites, it is a sure bet they would be congratulated, not condemned.

It does not help the cause of the censors to invoke the politics of multiculturalism. For all the talk about diversity, over 80 percent of Americans are Christian and over 90 percent believe in God. And that is why attempts to secularize our society in the name of diversity are intellectually and morally indefensible. To be blunt, were it not for our Judeo-Christian heritage, freedom would not exist. Not here, not anywhere.

Finally, religious speech is entitled to the same protections as political speech. For those who disagree, it would be helpful if they thought of religious speech the way they do obscene speech. Then our rights would surely be secured.

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### **December 3**

**Glendale, OH**—Officials took part in a Holiday Walk on the Village Square, but no one explained what holiday was being celebrated.

### **December 3 & 4**

**Denver, CO**—The city's annual Parade of Lights, sponsored chiefly by NBC affiliate KUSA-TV, banned the words "Merry Christmas" from all floats, as well as all Christmas songs.

Parade spokesman Michael Krikorian said the decision to discriminate against Christians was made “out of respect for other religions in the region.” Meanwhile, the parade honored homosexual and lesbian American Indians as “Holy People.”

#### **December 4**

**Franklin, MI**—The village changed the name of its annual “Holly Day” to “the Franklin Winter Festival.” Prominent store owner Les Gorback, who pushed for the new name, said, “Holly Day had the connotation it was strictly a Christmas holiday festival.” According to Gorback, “We wanted to try to make it more inclusive, so we changed the name.”

#### **December 4**

**Fontana, CA**—Santa Claus—who is not associated with anything other than Christmas—inexplicably appeared at the annual Festival of Winter’s parade through Miller Park.

#### **December 6**

**Wellesley, MA**—When the town reversed policy and agreed to place a menorah in front of the town hall, town counsel Albert Robinson said it would be a giant legal step to place a crèche there, too.

#### **December 7**

**New York, NY**—Mayor Michael Bloomberg insisted that the City Hall Christmas Tree was really a “holiday tree.”

#### **December 9**

**Sunny Isles Beach, FL**—The city’s fourth annual holiday park lighting ceremony featured Santa Claus, but no Christmas Trees, menorahs, crèches, or any other religious symbols. According to Susan Simpson, director of the Sunny Isles Beach Cultural and Human Services Department, excluding Christmas Trees and menorahs made the event inclusive.

#### **December 10**

**New York, NY**—As city workers were tearing down Christmas

lights that residents of a lower East Side housing project had been putting up annually for a decade, the New York City Housing Authority reversed a directive from the previous day demanding that “All lights must be removed at once.”

### **December 12**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**—Municipal officials called the Christmas Tree outside Borough Hall a “holiday tree” and, according to the *Bergen Record*, refused to allow a menorah there, too, because then they might have to allow other religious symbols.

### **December 15**

**Bay Harbor Islands, FL**—With the assistance of the Thomas More Law center, Sondra Snowden successfully sued the town of Bay Harbor Islands, near Miami, reversing its discriminatory practice of banning the placement of a crèche in the town’s main square, while permitting the display of menorahs. The Star of David was also hung on lampposts throughout the town.

Snowdon supplied the crèche herself the following week at her own expense, dedicating it to the memory of her mother. Amidst honking cars and Christmas carolers, Father Peter Lickman of St. Basil Catholic Church blessed the manger scene in a brief ceremony. Snowden, however, told Fox’s Bill O’Reilly, “there’s still discrimination. I have walked down the street and been spit on. I have threatening phone calls that come into me.”

### **December 15**

**Hobbs, NM**—After a written request from the Catholic League, Lea County Correctional Facility stated that it would make an exception to the prison’s restriction on showing R-rated films to inmates and allow a screening of Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ” during Christmastime. A Catholic inmate had asked for the League’s assistance.

### **December 15**

**Pasco County, FL**—County officials banned Christmas trees from public buildings after the county attorney determined that

they were religious symbols. The American Center for Law and Justice called the action “the most extreme example of censorship imaginable.”

#### **December 16**

**Stafford Township, NJ**—After initially balking at erecting a crèche in the municipal courtyard, the mayor agreed to accept a lighted nativity scene from a Catholic church; it became the centerpiece of the town’s holiday display representing various faiths.

#### **December 17**

**Pasco County, FL**—After a deluge of angry phone calls and e-mails, plus a threatened lawsuit, officials reversed a Christmas Tree ban that had caused the removal of dozens of trees in county buildings; many of the trees were decorated by local schoolchildren.

#### **December 22**

**Layton, UT**—Following a 20-year tradition, Layton banned a crèche while allowing a paganistic “Winter Zoo.” It featured dinosaurs, monkeys, bears and dozens of other lighted animals.

**The Catholic League erected its annual crèche in Manhattan’s Central Park on December 21.**