

OREGON SCHOOL RESTORES “GIVING TREE”

A day after we commented and urged our members to contact Oregon's Ashland School District Superintendent, a “Giving Tree” that was removed from Belleview Elementary School was restored.

Belleview Elementary's principal, Michelle Zundel, said that one family made a complaint about the “Giving Tree” that was displayed in the school lobby, and had it removed. “The decision to remove the tree was a very difficult one because the important constitutional issues for a school are to maintain neutrality.” According to one news report, Ashland Superintendent Juli Di Chiro said that school officials were working on developing district-wide rules to address such issues.

This was all based on ignorance: (a) a Christmas tree—never mind a “Giving Tree”—is not a religious symbol, (b) there are no constitutional issues involved in displaying secular symbols in the schools, and (c) they have had a policy governing such matters since 1989.

Ashland School District 5 school officials ought to have read their own policy, “Teaching about Religion.” Guideline #7 explicitly states: “No public school funds shall be used for an intended devotional display or religious symbols such as a Star of David, cross, crucifix, Christmas nativity scene or a Buddhist statue of sacred monkeys.”

Note that the policy mentioned absolutely nothing about banning secular symbols, such as a Christmas tree, never mind some fictional “Giving Tree.” That's because there is no constitutional issue at stake.

We urged our members to contact Di Chiro prior to the school

meeting with parents upset by the situation. After hearing from those parents and being pounded with e-mails from our members and supporters, Zundel decided to restore the tree to the school's lobby. But there was still one condition: the tree had to be modified to avoid favoring any religion. We recommended that they cut off all of the branches, leaving only the trunk.

There is no such thing as a "Giving Tree," and everyone knows it. Moreover, the reason they gave "presents"—another word they refused to use—is because it was Christmastime. That's what Christians do at that time of year: they celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ by giving loved ones, friends and the needy Christmas presents. Even many of those who do the linguistic dance—not calling a Christmas tree a Christmas tree—are known to exchange gifts.

The politics of multiculturalism, especially when vented in December, is political correctness gone mad. Worse, it makes liars out of its proponents. To wit: even they know in their heart of hearts that there would be no Christmas tree, no exchange of presents and no time off school, were it not for the baby Jesus.