

R.I. TEACHERS CAN OBSERVE GOOD FRIDAY

Teachers in Cranston, Rhode Island were successful in a lawsuit that they filed against the Cranston school district after being told classes would be held on Good Friday. As a result of the lawsuit, the school committee decided schools will be closed on Good Friday for the 2015-2016 school year. This comes after a recent court decision ruled that Rhode Island teachers could absent themselves from school to observe Good Friday.

Jewish teachers in Cranston are allowed to take off on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but originally, Catholics were required to teach on Good Friday. This didn't sit too well with Catholics, so on March 16 they sued. Now the edict, which was issued by school superintendent Judith Lundsten, has been overturned by court order.

The reasoning put forward by Lundsten is specious at best and obnoxious at worst. "Based on information and belief, Good Friday has no required services," she said. But it is not the business of government agents to assess holy days, or religious traditions, weighing them on their state scale. That is exactly what Lundsten did: she decided that because Catholics are not required to attend Good Friday services, they should not be allowed to go to Church services during the day.

Moreover, these same public school officials allowed Jews to take off Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. Did they really think that their attempt to stiff Christians would not backfire?

According to the court decision, as long as teachers submitted their request by April 1, they could observe Good Friday, with impunity.

This issue should never have made its way to the courts. Cranston officials look enfeebled when they demand proof that Good Friday services are held at area churches. If they were practicing Christians, they wouldn't have to ask such a dumb question.

If the issue is satisfying the minimum number of school days that are required by state law—not an unreasonable issue—why shouldn't all traditional holidays, secular as well as religious, be considered for reevaluation? Why not propose to keep the schools open on Labor Day or Martin Luther King Day?

There was a time when people such as Cardinal John O'Connor had to plead with professional baseball not to have opening day on Good Friday. Now we've descended to such a low that Catholic public school teachers have to fight for their right to attend liturgical services on Good Friday. What's next—requiring Catholic employees to bring a pastor's note proving they were in church?