

TYPICAL GOVERNMENT ANSWER

Over the summer, we contacted Andrea Saltzberg Emodi, a government official at the Department of Corrections in Massachusetts. Her address is so long that it must make the Guinness Book of World Records. For those of you who doubt our word, here it is:

*Ms. Andrea Saltzberg Emodi
Director of Program Services
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Public Safety
Department of Corrections
Office of Management and Placement
c/o Correctional Industries
P.O. Box 709
Norfolk, MA 02056*

The reason we were miffed at Andrea is because of her April 18 memo informing all chaplains that they were to discontinue the practice of distributing greeting cards; this was done on the basis of a recommendation from the Religious Services Review Committee and was approved by Commissioner Maloney. Our request was simply to find out the legal rationale undergirding this decision.

On October 2, Andrea wrote to us explaining that a prison advocacy group from Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services had expressed concerns that certain religions were being favored by the Department's practice of allowing chaplains to distribute holy cards. "Accordingly," she writes, "in an effort to ensure that all inmates are treated equally, the Department has decided to carry only generic holiday cards in the inmate canteen...and to discontinue the practice of dissemination of holiday cards by specific religious representatives."

This is a typical government response. Instead of making sure that everyone's religious rights are respected, the decision is made to disrespect all of them equally. To make matters worse, consider how her letter ended: "It is expected that everyone will be satisfied with this change and that no one will object to the equal treatment afforded to all concerned."

Let Andrea know that some of us are not satisfied with this knee-jerk bureaucratic response. That's assuming your envelope is big enough to carry her address.