



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ Rep. Henry Brown, R-S.C., recently introduced a resolution expressing support for the display of the words "God Bless America" in the nation's public schools. The nonbinding House resolution, approved 404 to 0, reads, "it is the sense of the Congress that public schools may display the words 'God Bless America' as an expression of support for the Nation."

◆ Rabbi Arnold Resnicoff, a retired high-ranking military chaplain, has been named national director of interreligious relations for the American Jewish Committee. Resnicoff, who retired earlier this year as command chaplain for the armed forces in the European Command, will direct U.S. relations in coordination with Rabbi David Rosen, who oversees international relations from Jerusalem. Resnicoff succeeds Rabbi James Rudin, who retired last year and continues as a senior interreligious adviser for the AJC.

◆ Bishop Felton E. May, leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church, spoke on the tension some pastors feel between patriotism and preaching. "I love the flag. I will salute it. I have saluted it as a member of the United States Army. I will pledge allegiance to it, but I will not wrap myself in the flag because I have wrapped myself in Jesus Christ." Δ

Supreme Court agrees to hear challenge to canvassing statute



The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to hear arguments in an Ohio case regarding the practice of door-to-door evangelism. The case stems from a lawsuit brought against the town of Stratton, Ohio, by mem-

bers of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In the case, *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society vs. Village of Stratton, Ohio*, members of the national Jehovah's Witnesses organization and a local Jehovah's Witnesses congregation sued the government and mayor of Stratton.

The plaintiffs were trying to prevent the town from implementing a 1998 law requiring any neighborhood canvasser — from door-to-door evangelists to schoolchildren raising funds to itinerant salesmen — to receive a permit from the mayor's office before beginning their solicitation.

The Jehovah's Witnesses argued the statute violated their First Amendment right to free exercise of religion. A major tenet of the Jehovah's Witnesses faith is that practitioners participate in door-to-door evangelistic efforts.

The Jehovah's Witnesses also argued that the ordinance violated the freedom of press and freedom of speech clauses of the First Amendment. Specifically, they contended the ordinance violated a right to "anonymous" political speech established by past high court decisions.

Justices, however, agreed to hear only the anonymous-speech portion of the Jehovah's Witnesses argument.

The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld most of the town's canvassing statute. In accepting only a portion of the

case, justices allowed to stand the lower court ruling that requiring permits for door-to-door proselytizing does not impose an unreasonable burden on religious expression.

Paul Polidoro, the lead attorney for the Jehovah's Witnesses group, said he was happy the court will hear the case but disappointed that it will not be decided on religious liberty grounds.

Polidoro said the Jehovah's Witnesses object to being required to get government permission before doing door-to-door evangelism because they believe it cuts at the heart of their faith. "They feel that the right to engage in their ministry comes from God — it is a commission," he explained. "Since they have that commission from God, it would almost be an insult to God for them to then go and ask man's permission to fulfill it."

Brent Walker, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said that since the case is being argued on free-speech grounds, it will not have as direct an effect on religious liberty issues as it could have had the justices agreed to hear the Jehovah's Witnesses' entire argument.

"The court declined to review the more interesting and perhaps more important legal issue concerning the contours of the Witnesses' rights under the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause," he noted. "Although it is impossible to predict the outcome, the court generally disfavors registration requirements and tends closely to examine any such attempts on the part of government — particularly when applied to noncommercial speech."

Polidoro said he expects the Supreme Court to hear arguments in the case in February. Δ

Suit charges school with anti-Jewish bias

Three professors and a non-Jewish student have filed a lawsuit against St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, claiming they faced anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination at the school.

In their lawsuit filed Oct. 17, the professors claimed they were blocked from receiving equal pay and promotions because of anti-Semitism.

University administrators disparaged classes taught by Jewish professors, the professors claimed, and failed to fully recognize the professors' previous teaching experience, according to The Associated Press.

One plaintiff — history professor Laurinda Stryker — said the university recommended that she not retain her post after she denounced discrimination. Another plaintiff claimed the university did not interview him for a tenure-track position because he delivered a lecture about the Holocaust.

In a statement issued Oct. 17 with the Minnesota State Colleges and University System, St. Cloud State University declared that "when concerns are raised, the university takes appropriate steps to respond."

"The university is reviewing the complaint filed today and does not intend to comment on its merits," the statement said. Δ

Suit challenges school district's policy on religious fliers

The American Center for Law and Justice has filed suit against the San Diego Unified School District, claiming school officials would not permit a local church to advertise parental seminars addressing such topics as school violence.

The law firm is representing the Rev. James Jerspeeth, pastor of Atonement Lutheran Church in San Diego, which has attempted since early this year to place fliers on school bulletin boards about upcoming seminars. The suit, filed Oct. 4, charges that the district does not allow equal access for advertisements because it prohibits groups with religious viewpoints from posting information about their events.

"Religious organizations must receive equal treatment under the law and that clearly has not occurred in this situation," said Stuart Roth, senior counsel of the law firm founded by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, in a statement.

"It is particularly troubling that a church that wanted to help the San Diego community deal with the trauma and tragedy of recent school violence was spurned and discriminated against."

The church, which is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has offered seminars on topics such as "How to Spot a Troubled Kid: Stopping the Violence" and "Be a Better Parent."

The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in San Diego, seeks a judgment declaring the school policy unconstitutional.

School officials declined to react to the suit on Oct. 8. "We have not seen the suit so we can't comment at this time," David Smollar, spokesman for the school district, told Religion News Service.

Roth said he thinks the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Good News Club vs. Milford Central School*, which required equal treatment by public schools of religious organizations among other community groups, will help his case.

"If a school district opens its facilities for use to other community organizations, it cannot deny access to a religious group," he said. Δ

House resolution deploras violence against Sikhs

Two members of the House of Representatives have introduced a bipartisan resolution condemning bigotry and violence against Sikh Americans following

the Sept. 11 strikes against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

The resolution sponsored by Reps. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., and Mike Honda, D-Calif., calls for the protection of the civil rights of Sikh Americans and all Americans "in the quest to identify, locate and bring to justice" those responsible for the attacks.

Sikh Americans — "easily recognizable by their turbans and beards, which are required articles of their faith, have suffered both verbal and physical assaults as a result of misguided anger toward Arab Americans and Muslim Americans" in the wake of the attacks, the resolution said.

Within seven days of the attack, at least 200 attacks against Sikhs in the United States had been reported, according to Amnesty International.

The resolution, announced Oct. 4, calls upon "local and federal law enforcement authorities to work to prevent hate crimes against all Americans, including Sikh Americans; and calls upon local and federal law enforcement authorities to prosecute to the fullest extent of the law all those who commit hate crimes."

An estimated 500,000 of the world's 22 million Sikhs live in the United States. Δ

Supreme Court orders review of prayer day suit

The U.S. Supreme Court ordered a federal appeals court to review a case concerning a National Day of Prayer rally at a city park in Tucson, Ariz.

The high court issued the decision Oct. 9, throwing out a ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, The Associated Press reported.

The case centered on whether taxpayers should cover \$340 in expenses for the 1997 rally. Prayer day organizers argued that Tucson should have covered the costs for park equipment and services as it has for other groups.

The high court said the case should be reconsidered after its ruling in June that a Bible club cannot be prohibited from meeting in a public school if other groups with a moral viewpoint can meet in school facilities. In other actions Oct. 9, the high court:

- ◆ declined an appeal of a Texas police officer who was fired for wearing a pin in the shape of a gold cross on his uniform.

- ◆ declined an appeal of a fired Mississippi hospital counselor who said she refused to advise a lesbian client because of her religious objections to homosexuality. Δ

Patriotism surge raises questions about use of flags in sanctuaries



The events of Sept. 11 have spawned a profusion of patriotism and flag waving – more than I have ever seen. From highway overpasses, to car antennas, to home (including mine) and suit lapels, Old Glory is everywhere.

American flags also adorn most Baptist church sanctuaries. During the past six weeks, we have had a flood of inquiries about the propriety of flying the American flag in church. Should American flags be displayed in Baptist churches? The short answer is yes, but only in certain places and at special times.

Of course, this practice does not constitute a constitutional violation. The First Amendment's Establishment Clause bars government endorsement of a religious message; it does not prohibit a church from endorsing a patriotic symbol. The objection to the routine display of an American flag in the sanctuary is that it represents an act of "civil religion" which, for some, including me, raises serious theological concerns.

At worst, the placement of an American flag at the front of the sanctuary can result in "flag worship" — a form of idolatry. At best, when the American flag is placed alongside of the Christian flag, it signals equivalence between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar. Christians know that this is not the case. We are citizens of two kingdoms. Yes, we are to respect our governmental institutions and pray for our governmental leaders, but that must always be secondary to our commitment to and love for God. Faith in God is superior to love of country; allegiance to God transcends all nationalism.

In any case, displaying the American flag in the sanctuary in Baptist churches in America diminishes our ability to reach out to non-Americans. This is particularly true in places like Washington, D.C., where citizens from other countries routinely attend and worship with us. It sends a terrible signal to believers and

unbelievers alike from around the world that somehow the Kingdom of God and United States of America are either the same or are on equal footing.

Even if it is not advisable to display the flag routinely in the worship center, there are other opportunities to show and celebrate the flag. Here are several ideas:

1. It is quite appropriate to display the flag, even in the sanctuary, on special occasions. These include the day of worship closest to the Fourth of July when we celebrate our independence, religious freedom day when we express gratitude for the freedom we enjoy as Americans, and yes, even in times of national crisis and mourning. However, even then, the flag should be positioned in a way that does not signify equivalence with the Kingdom of God.

2. It is also fitting to display the American flag along with flags from other countries. This would be an appropriate gesture, for example, on World Communion Sunday or during a global missions emphasis. The symbolism would signify unity with Christians throughout the world.

3. Finally, the flag can be displayed routinely in other parts of the church campus not specifically devoted to the worship of God. This could include the fellowship hall, assembly rooms, the vestibule and other places where it can be seen and appreciated, but where it does not threaten to displace the cross as the quintessential symbol of Christianity.

In this connection Tim Turnham has recognized the symbolism involved in displaying the flag in the vestibule. He writes: "We would see the flags in the foyer as an indication that we go in to worship God and go out to live our lives as God's people in a community where we have chosen to live."

A healthy sense of patriotism is good. But we are Christians first and Americans second. When these words are used together, "Christian" is the noun; "American" is the adjective. Our symbolism in worship should reflect that theological truth. Δ

Memorial Gifts

Gifts in memory of
W. Barry Garrett:

John and Rosemary Brevard
San Antonio, Texas

Peggy W. Cockrill
Jeffersonton, Va.

Ruth Dickerson Duncan
Durham, N.C.

Marvin W. Emmons
Mount Laurel, N.J.

Diane A. Fox
Bethesda, Md.

Katherine A. Howell
Olny, Md.

J. Katherine Johnson
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Vivian T. Jones
Altoona, Fla.

Ina G. Lintz
Knoxville, Tenn.

Jerry and Adell Martin
Kensington, Md.

Nan McGee
Dallas, Texas

Theo and Jean
Sommerkamp
Columbus, Ohio

Alice A. Weber
Mount Airy, Md.

Gifts in memory of
Jerry "J.J." Jarnagin:

Don Moore Sunday
School Class, Ravensworth
Baptist Church
Annandale, Va.

Baptist Joint Committee

Supporting Bodies

- ◆ Alliance of Baptists
- ◆ American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.
- ◆ Baptist General Association of Virginia
- ◆ Baptist General Conference
- ◆ Baptist General Convention of Texas
- ◆ Baptist State Convention of North Carolina
- ◆ Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
- ◆ National Baptist Convention of America
- ◆ National Baptist Convention U.S.A. Inc.
- ◆ National Missionary Baptist Convention
- ◆ North American Baptist Conference
- ◆ Progressive National Baptist Convention Inc.
- ◆ Religious Liberty Council
- ◆ Seventh Day Baptist General Conference

REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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Brazilian church models genuine 'faith initiatives'

The social-redemptive ministries of the First Baptist Church of Niteroi, Brazil, illustrate what real faith is and what can be accomplished by churches who live by actual faith, not by government subsidies.

Several years ago Pastor Nilson Fanini led his church to initiate various services to and for the needy of Niteroi. The church began with three types of service: medical, cooking and sewing classes. Volunteers dedicated a few hours per week to provide nursing services. Pastor Fanini prayed for the winning of physicians. Soon two doctors came to faith in Christ and devoted a few hours each week to a clinic they set up in the church building. Soon dentists were similarly added. Doctors and nurses also provided basic suggestions for improved health care in the homes. Tons of clothing were distributed each year to the needy.

Women trained in cooking and child-care offered classes to help mothers provide more nutritious meals for their families. Seamstresses taught mothers how to sew — to provide clothing for the family and some to earn extra income.

Literacy classes were initiated in the fast-growing city. Volunteers worked to assist people who moved from rural areas discover needed city facilities and how to use city transportation. Other volunteers worked to help them find employment. Still others assisted in constructing better housing, and trained newcomers in various skills: carpentry, plumbing, mechanics, etc. Youth groups provided literacy teaching, helped students advance in their studies, provided Christian recreational opportunities and training and fired them with ambition to excel.

People who heard about all the min-

istries of the church were attracted to examine their faith, principles and practices. The dedication of believers to Christ and to service to others served as a magnet, attracting them to faith in Jesus Christ. Many new congregations and churches were started and the FBC grew to be one of the largest and most active churches of the world.

These are real faith initiatives. The churches depend upon the unlimited resources of God rather than on government dole. They practice Christian ministries in harmony with teachings of Christ, motivated, not by greed for government money to save themselves from the cost of discipleship, but by the love of Christ which impels them "to live no longer for themselves, but for him who for their sakes died and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Religious liberty is enhanced and expanded rather than being undermined by government regulations and restrictions. Onlookers are attracted to examine their faith and message rather than being antagonized by compulsion to give to religious entities whether or not they wish. Christ is exalted rather than denied. Disciples follow Christ, "go where He goes," rather than shirking their responsibilities and letting government do it.

The church that attempts to spare its members the costs of providing ministries commanded by Christ will perish. The church that pays the costs by dedicating self, vocation, training, time, talents and money will experience the resurrection power of God and will sing: "Thanks be unto God who always leads us in triumph in Christ Jesus!"

— **Joseph B. Underwood**
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