



A harmonious compromise was reached between the embattled when nativity scenes and Christmas pageants were replaced with more seasonal productions. (Photo/Mindy Saunders)

by BARBARA UNDERWOOD

In recent years past, programs once popularly characterized as Christmas concerts have been the cause of some agitated comments at school board meetings from parents protesting their content.

Holiday concerts or winter concerts have gradually replaced the public schools' Christmas concerts of Christmases past.

As a result, the hue and cry over the programs apparently has subsided in many suburban communities. The change in the programs has not been in name only.

In most cases the result has been to remove any religious connotations from the programs and even from school decorations.

ART DOMALSKE, assistant superintendent for instruction in the Livonia Public Schools, sums up the change with "Santa Claus is OK" along with snowflakes, snowmen "and all those little Christmasy-type songs."

But there is "a clear ban on manger scenes and the like," Domalske added.

In both Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills certain religious groups have objected to the content (or lack of content) of programs in recent years.

But last year no questions were raised and Dr. David Spencer, deputy superintendent for instruction, said he "took that to mean there were no problems."

The same quiet prevailed in Birmingham last year, according to Dr. Frank Goetz, deputy superintendent for instruction.

IN 1976, a Birmingham parent went to the board of education on behalf of some Jewish students who objected to singing the line "Jesus our brother" in one of the songs on the holiday concert program at Berkshire Junior High.

Other parents objected to the objection, with one asking, "Where do we stop when we start censoring?"

"Any child has the right not to sing a song he doesn't want to," she added.

In 1977, several Mormon parents in Bloomfield Hills protested when they learned that songs with Christian connotations had been deleted from Lahser High School's annual concert.

Most school districts have rather stringent policies or procedures which speak to what can and can't be included in a holiday concert.

ALSO, PUBLIC schools are required by law "to remain essentially neutral and not be advocates of any one religion," Livonia's Domalske said.

And Livonia itself has "some pretty clear policies that restrict all school personnel from dealing with religious subjects and ritual," he added.

Teachers are permitted to "teach facts about a number of religions if they are

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