

December dilemma

School holiday (Christmas) programs pose problems for non-Christian kids

IT'S CALLED the December dilemma. How does a Christian majority which — at this time of year especially — espouses love, brotherhood and peace on earth, conduct itself in the presence of its non-Christian brethren when it comes to Christmas celebrations?

The quandary surfaces in the public schools where Christmas pageants, Christmas concerts and Christmas decorations have long been a tradition, culminating in a Christmas vacation. Most have been supplanted by holiday concerts and decorations.

In America, a country founded on principles of freedom of worship, Christmas, a religious holiday, traditionally has been a national holiday like Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July.

What concessions are being made to the growing numbers in Oakland County schools who do not celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ — among them Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and atheists?

Federal law provides few guidelines. While prayer is banned in the school, in the 1980 case of *Flory vs. Snapp*, court ruled that public schools could permit observances of holidays with both a religious and secular basis in the school.

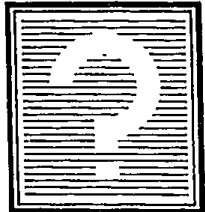
Those observances could include the performance of music, art, literature and drama having a religious theme so long as it was presented in a "prudent and objective manner." Students not wishing to participate were to be excused.

NANCY STARK, information officer for the Oakland Intermediate Schools, said the matter is left to local school boards. "We've had no reports of problems in recent years. The problem seems to be resolving itself."

Few school districts, however, have addressed the issue in a written policy. Birmingham Public Schools has. Guidelines adopted in 1977 state, "It is the responsibility of the public schools to teach mutual understanding and brotherhood and respect for group differences. In pursuing this goal, teaching in the public schools can and should take cognizance of the fact that holidays are observed differently by different religious groups. Such teaching should be just and fair and should avoid any doctrinal impact with respect to religious issues."

Procedures to be followed in planning December concerts include annual reviews by a deputy superintendent with building principals. Each principal is responsible for ap-

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proving "instructional programs and performances where religious practices and doctrines may become an issue."

Programs, the guidelines advise, should be arranged to ensure "an appropriate balance. . . . It should not be necessary to eliminate or ignore sacred or liturgical music, but staff should refrain from developing a program that draws too heavily from this source."

Students are given the option of

being excused from performing religious songs but, the policy states, "It should generally not be necessary for the student to leave the group while such a song is sung but remain quietly in place until he/she can continue singing."

BLOOMFIELD HILLS SCHOOLS also have a policy on the books since 1983, said Paul Gwinn, director of elementary and middle schools. In addressing musical programs, Gwinn said, "The main theme of the concert cannot be religious. It can use some religious music, but it cannot be the focus."

Whether Christmas or Hanukkah, Gwinn said, decorations are allowed. "Christmas is treated no differently than Jewish holidays." If a question on the appropriateness arises at the building level, the issue is referred to a district screening committee for review.

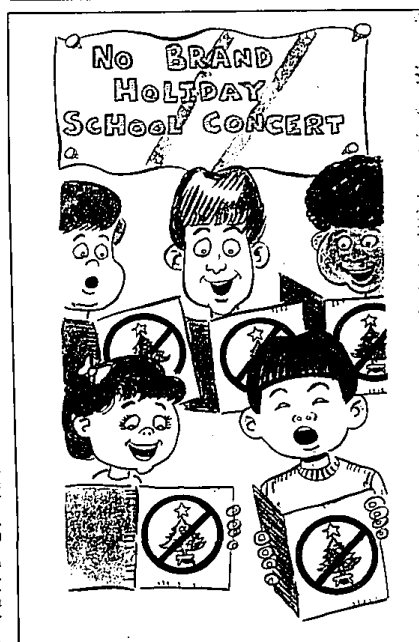
"At first everything came for review," Gwinn said, "but they found very little needed changes."

There is a growing sensitivity to a changing community, Gwinn said. "We want to make sure we're not interfering with other ideas. We want to be sure we're not offending anyone." Complaints have been few.

While a policy was already established prohibiting tests, quizzes and field trips on days recognized to be Jewish holy days, the district has gone a step further. Beginning next year, Yom Kippur, the Jewish high holy day, will be a non-attendance day for all students.

WEST BLOOMFIELD SCHOOLS superintendent is Seymour Gretchko, who is Jewish. "There is no written policy," Gretchko said, concerning expressions of religious holidays in the schools. "We do recognize that we live in a pluralistic society. We avoid doing things that are objectionable to some." Decisions on what is acceptable are based on common sense and the recognition of pluralism, he said.

There have been no specific complaints in his years as superintendent, Gretchko said, but questions have arisen in regard to music selections. "It's a difficult circumstance,



There is no single answer to satisfy everyone. We cannot deny Christmas is part of American life. It's always an issue. It's a no-winner."

Susan Rennels, trustee on the Farmington Schools board of education, said the district has a policy that touches on holidays at this time of year.

Reading from the policy, she said, "Music, art, literature, drama and other areas which deal with religious subjects are permitted when they have instructional value."

Janice Rolnick, trustee and secretary of the Farmington board, said, "It is to be a holiday season with nothing religious. Concerts are to have holiday themes with nothing religious. It really does disturb a lot of people. We try to keep everything secular."

Rolnick said the policy has been in

place for several years and it was an "uphill battle" trying to implement it in certain departments, specifically music.

"We're just trying to get away from the idea that it's just a Christian world."

"Generally, everyone handles it tastefully," Rennels added.

SOUTHFIELD SCHOOLS rely on an unwritten policy, said Ken Silver, director of information services for the district.

"Our general position is we de-emphasize religion," Silver said. "It's very secular."

Frosty the Snowman, not Santa, visits the preschool. No Christmas trees are in the schools, but they may be on the bulletin board. Equal time, he said, is given to Hanukkah. Concerts are called winter concerts and include songs about sleigh rides and uncle bells.

2 clergymen would ban Christmas from schools

Two local clergymen say Christmas has no place whatsoever in the schools.

The issue is one of separation of church and state, not a Jewish-Christian issue, says Rabbi Paul Yedwab of Temple Israel in West Bloomfield. "Hindus and Muslims are being ignored."

Yedwab wants no equal time for Hanukkah in December. "Christmas is a central holiday, Hanukkah is a minor one. They are not comparable. They are apples and oranges. The juxtaposition of Christmas and Hanukkah is unfortunate."

That's not the major issue, Yedwab said. Celebration of any religion has no place in the schools, he said, "ex-

cept in an academic sense, in social studies in a study of the world's religions." In that case, it should include mention of all religions, he said.

Rev. James Lyons believes that neither Christmas nor the false Christmas should be observed in the schools. "As a clergyman, I believe that what passes as Christmas has very little to do with the religion," said Lyons, director of the Ecumenical Institute for Jewish-Christian Studies in Southfield.

"Santa Claus and reindeer have little to do with the significance of Christmas. That is totally false for my purposes. Religion in essence belongs in the churches and synagogues and mosques."

business briefs

If you recently opened a shop, captured an award, earned a promotion, are planning a new venture or project, or have information about other business-related happenings — and there's a Farmington-area connection — we'd like to hear from you so we can share your news item with other Observer readers. Send items to: Business Briefs, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024.

● SHE'S PROMOTED

Karen Barbara of Farmington has joined the Competitive Edge as senior media buyer.

Barbara's responsibilities at the Birmingham firm include planning and buying media in 10 major markets for GMC Truck regional, market support and dealer association advertising accounts. Before joining the firm, Barbara was a local market specialist at Campbell-Ewald, where she bought media for the Chevrolet, Eastern Airlines and AC/Deleo accounts.

She is a member of the Aircraft Club of Detroit.

The Competitive Edge is a full-service retail agency specializing in co-op, market advertising.

● COMPUTER GRAPHICS

Open on a multicolored, 3-dimensional crystalline city. Watch it recede as an animated robotic arm swings into view. Twisting and turning, the arm comes to center frame and opens to reveal a 3-D version of the Chrysler Pentastar logo.

Add a dash of special effects generated titling to the meeting theme of "Working Together to be the Best" and you have the 30-second, computer-animated open for the business meeting portion of Chrysler Motor's annual fall announcement show.

Created by Detroit-based Ross Roy Productions, the business meeting is a component of Chrysler's new car introduction show each fall. It is used to communicate the sales and marketing objectives to the automotive company's dealer network. In a repeat of last year's meeting format, this year's presentation was produced on videotape. It included use of computer graphics and special effects. Hundreds of graphs, logos and charts were created to illustrate key information.

Having worked with Farmington Hills-based Grace & Wild Studios on its 1987 show, Ross Roy Productions' creative team knew the facility could assemble a presentation using computer animation and special effects. And working on video allowed maximum use of the flexibility of the format.

Highlights include a 6-piece jigsaw puzzle that assembles itself to reveal a full-frame Dodge truck logo, a 3-D Pentastar crossing in front of a variety of logos, highlighting each one as it passes, and customized titles for individual segments, including a variety of "looks," ranging from embossed to stucco.

The entire presentation (actually three, since individual ones were produced for Dodge dealers, Chrysler/Plymouth dealers and Chrysler of Canada) was produced at Grace & Wild.

Grace & Wild's Scott Wasmuth created the Symbolics-generated 3-D animated opening and Sean Phillips produced the 3-D animated and still material. Gary Shifflet and Ken Mitchell handled the editing and mixing.

Ross Roy Productions is a production company specializing in shows and meetings, teleconferencing, interactive videodisc production, training and product presentations in film, videotape or slide formats.

Grace & Wild is a full-service videotape production and post-production facility in Studio Center, a Farmington Hills communications production complex.

● SHE'S ELECTED

Susan Bondy of Farmington Hills was elected to the Tiffin University Board of Trustees, Tiffin, Ohio.

Author of the 1982 bestseller "How To Make Money Using Other People's Money," Bondy writes "Bondy on Money," a nationally syndicated column that boasts a readership of 15 million.

She was commencement speaker at Tiffin University's 1987 graduation and received a doctor of laws degree at that time.

After spending 15 years of her life on a kibbutz in Israel, Bondy returned to the United States to begin her business career at Manufacturers Hanover Trust in 1970. She then joined James Oliphant as director of the analytical sciences division. In 1977, she was named vice president and senior consultant at A.G. Becker.

Currently, she heads Money Matters in New York and The Bondy Group in Farmington Hills.

● OPENS OFFICE

Dr. William Heise II of Farmington Hills has opened an office in Walled Lake at 2346 S. Commerce at Decker.

Heise is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine and is on staff at Huron Valley Hospital, Commerce Township.

Appointments can be made by calling 624-7860 between 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. weekdays.

● ELECTED VP

Dr. Samuel Jassenoff, a Farmington Hills osteopathic physician, has been elected vice president of the American Osteopathic College of Radiology.

Jassenoff received his D.O. degree from the Philadelphia College of Osteopathy. Board certified in radiology, he is on staff at Botsford General Hospital, Farmington Hills.

Jassenoff, a Fellow of the American Osteopathic College of Radiology, is a member of the Michigan Association of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons and the American Osteopathic Association.

Osteopathic physicians are required to earn 150 continuing medical education credit hours every three years to maintain AOA membership. This education leads to the continued excellence of patient care, the growth of knowledge and the refinement of medical skills.

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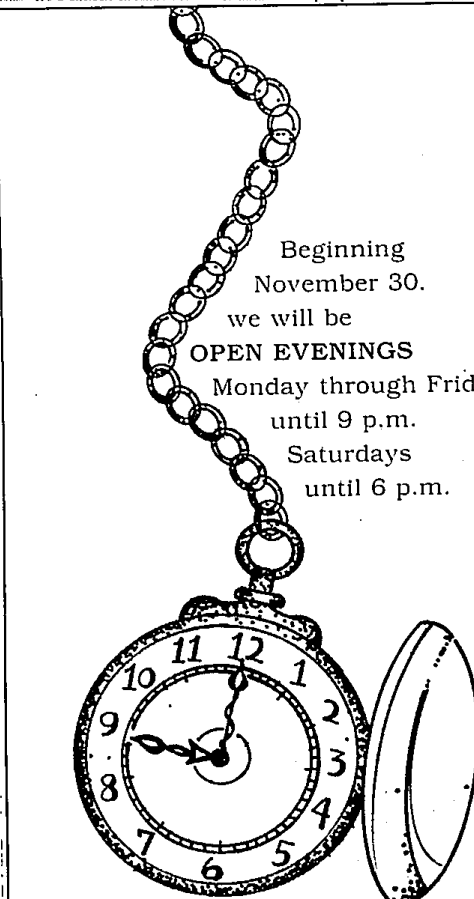
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