

points of view

Courts out of jurisdiction on this issue

IT'S JUST A FEW weeks until graduation time, and already the news pushers are starting to bombard us with stories about graduation activities and their related dangers.

This year a new controversy has emerged. It's prayer. Prayer at public school graduation ceremonies. Court cases on the issue are pending in states from Michigan to Utah, from Idaho to Rhode Island.

Last month the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the Rhode Island case, which started in 1989 when a couple filed suit against the Providence School Board after it refused to cancel a prayer scheduled as part of the graduation ceremonies for Nathan Bishop Middle School.

The suit, which the couple won in federal court and in a federal appeals court, contends that the doctrine of "separation of church and state" means prayer should be prohibited at public school graduations. So school districts all over the nation are keeping an eye on it.

NO MATTER which way the court rules — and no matter how forceful or how vague the opinion — somebody is not going to be satisfied. It's always that way. But some of the behind-the-scenes arguments are downright silly.

Some argue that a short prayer is as right as long as it's "non-sectarian." That, of course, leads lawyers to speculate on what is sectarian and what isn't. A prayer to "Jesus Christ," they pretty much agree, would be sectarian and probably so would one directed to "Our Heavenly Father." Some even worry that using the term "God" in a prayer would be too sectarian to be legal.

That kind of thinking caused the superintendent of a school district in Idaho, which has such a suit pending against it, to worry that "if this keeps going like some people want it to, pretty soon we'll have to address our prayers to 'To Whom It May Concern' and end with 'Sincerely Yours.'"

WELL, IT OCCURRED to me that the courts are always a little bit out of their jurisdiction when they decide on the legality or illegality of religious practices. If



Jack Gladden

there is a higher authority than the U.S. Supreme Court, then... You know what I mean?

Eventually the court, the highest authority in the land, will have to address the underlying question behind this whole debate: Is there a God? A definitive Supreme Court ruling on that question would put an end to most of these litigious confrontations and would save taxpayers a lot of money in court costs.

If the court ruled that there is no God, then all of the associated questions would be moot. How can you allow prayer in schools if there's nothing to pray to? What's the point of putting up religious symbols honoring something that doesn't exist?

Of course, if the court ruled that there is a God, then other questions would have to be addressed. Whose God is He? Or She?

What about organized religion? If the court ruled that there is a God, what religion does He or She represent? Christian, Jewish, Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, something else? If the Christian God theory prevailed, which denomination does He or She represent? (My bet is they'd go for Episcopalian, but that's just a hunch.)

The court would have to readress the question of church and state. How does God feel about separating them? Maybe He (or She) doesn't want them separated.

NOW YOU MAY think I'm being sacrilegious, but I'm not. It's just that virtually every case involving the relationship between church and state is as complex, as unanswerable, as the fundamental question behind the whole issue.

Jack Gladden is a copy editor at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. He lives in Canton Township.

from our readers

Good job by Hills cops

To the editor:

On behalf of PAALs (Patient Advocates and Liaisons), a group of men and women whose purpose is to protect patients who have appointments at women's health centers from harassment, I want to commend the Farmington Hills Police for the outstanding job they did on Saturday at Women's Center on Orchard Lake Road.

Not only did they prevent violence and anti-abortion rights groups from blockading the entrance, they also made sure that every woman who had an appointment got into the clinic without being harassed.

In contrast Novi police on Saturday allowed anti-abortion rights persons to physically blockade access to a doctor's office and made no effort to stop so-called sidewalk counselors from hurling verbal abuse at patients.

Thanks again, Farmington Hills police.

Marian McCracken, Farmington Hills

It's spring at long last

To the editor:

What is it about springtime that brings song to the hearts of most of us?

Is it the birds' "chirp, chirp, chirp"? Is it the cordial, friendly wind blowing through our hair? Maybe the sun's Vitamin D deserves the credit. Whatever the cause, the effect is usually positive. Very positive.

Who doesn't love that first 70 degree day, when that heavy winter jacket can be left in the car? When you can throw on a pair of shorts, and drive around town, with windows down, letting each and every motorist know your taste in music. And if they don't like Gloria Estefan, who cares? You will probably never see them again anyway.

Who cares? That's a common springtime attitude. An "I'll do my thing, you do your thing" attitude. A "so what's it to you" attitude. An "I wish I'd feel this way in January"

attitude. It's not an attitude problem. It's just an attitude.

For many, springtime is a time of refreshment. It's a time to forgive friends, family, and ourselves of those minor wrongdoings, which didn't seem so "minor" at the time.

After all, what could be so earthshakingly major that you should hold a life-long grudge? (Besides your mother-in-law's malicious insults).

LET IT GO. Forget about it. Wouldn't you rather be planting tulips with that person, than analyzing the situation over and over and over?

For others, springtime is when those long-forgotten New Year's resolutions are remembered. When we realize it's time to try on new bikinis is when we really remember Resolution No. 1: Diet.

Those incredible Mrs. Fields' double chocolate chip cookies now spell double trouble. Especially to our hips. Then we remember the "exercise" resolution.

After months of impatiently waiting for springtime, it is finally here. No more scraping the ice off the windshield. No more waiting for the electric blanket to get hot. It's finally here.

Live each day to the maximum. Relish each and every moment. Be with the people whose company you enjoy. Take a moonlit walk along the beach. What could beat that?

Cynthia L. Liebow, Farmington Hills

Reader raps Edison over tree trimming

To the editor:

Your recent article regarding Edison's tree-trimming really struck a tender spot.

I lived in the Old Homestead subdivision for 17 years and every other year Detroit Edison crews came onto our property to trim trees.

When they first requested permission to trim, I gave it automatically, but it became evident after just a few years that they were either using incompetent tree trimmers or they were purposely trying to kill the trees. I suspect the latter, as the

trees they trimmed looked very much like your before-and-after pictures.

In recent years I have not signed their notifications but they continue to butcher the trees — always when I am away from home.

For some years I have felt the urge to start a "cut down telephone poles, not trees" campaign.

William T. Smith, Farmington Hills

Let's elect a woman as president

To the editor:

It is time to think ahead. Let us assume that the Bush-man will have the aftermath of the war in the Gulf calmed, if not solved, so that he will be able to orchestrate his 1992 reelection without foreign problems.

Thus we can think about where Bush might find his next little war in 1993.

There was within Reagan (remember Grenada?), and there surely is within Bush (remember Panama?) an ego need for, and fulfillment in, the awful business of war.

The high ride in the saddle, so important to Reagan, is also important to Bush. Wars usually do not just happen. Men create them.

Women of the U.S., elect a woman as president.

Lee S. Peel, Farmington

Uniting to protest prejudice

To the editor:

The program "Gabriel's Fire" aired by the American Broadcasting Co. March 7, offended and angered the Ukrainian community. The story implied that the Ukrainians were responsible for the destruction of the six million Jews in the Holocaust.

We find these allegations historically inaccurate, prejudicial and counter productive to the promotion

of positive inter-ethnic relations in this country and elsewhere. The indisputable fact is that a small percentage of the population in all countries occupied by Nazi Germany was engaged in anti-Jewish activities.

We unequivocally condemn their acts, but at the same time believe that their criminal conduct does not justify branding an entire nation or ethnic community as anti-Semitic. The identification of the criminal in this story as Ukrainian subconsciously influences a viewer to transfer the guilt from a fictitious character in a make-believe situation to the real existing community from which he supposedly came.

We, the members of the Jewish-Polish, and Ukrainian-American Council of Metropolitan Detroit, recognize the painful history our three groups experienced in Eastern Europe and have united to work for a reconciliation among ourselves so that the destructive events of the past will not repeat themselves. Our sense of justice is offended when a prejudicial portrayal of Ukrainians or any other ethnic group is presented.

We ask and expect that future Holocaust themes be expressed with historical accuracy and be free of inflammatory statements or depictions. In respect to the victims of the Holocaust and the many Polish, Ukrainian and other non-Jewish victims of Nazi tyranny, and in recognition of those who heroically endangered their own lives to save others, we all owe this subject matter responsible and sensitive treatment.

Irene Sobel, American Jewish Committee; Kasimierz Olejarczyk, Polish American Congress; Michale J. Beresowski, Ukrainian American Coordinating Council

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Farmington Observer encourages its readers to share their views.

Letters should be mailed to the editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

WHAT DO HELEN KELLER AND JOHNNY APPLESEED HAVE IN COMMON?

Or Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe, William Blake, Carl Jung, Robert Frost and Van Morrison to name a few?

They were all deeply influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's philosophy and theology.

Want to learn more? You are invited to a four-part series entitled, "LIFE QUESTIONS", which will look at Swedenborg's ideas in a context of openness and acceptance of each person's individual views. Topics will include: "Who am I?", "Where am I going?", "Is there a God?", and "Is the universe friendly?" You can join with others in looking at these questions without worrying about pressure to think any one way or to join any organization.

The first session begins Friday, April 12, from 7:30 to 9 p.m. and will continue for the next three consecutive Friday evenings. Childcare is available. Cost is a \$4 optional donation or non-perishable foods per session. All proceeds will go to the Oakland County Food Bank.

Sponsored by the Royal Oak Swedenborgian Church and Growth Center, call 546-7583 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday-Friday to register. Register deadline Wednesday, April 10, 1991.

Our facilitator will be Rev. Steve Potts who serves both as a parish minister and local hospital chaplain.

The Royal Oak Swedenborgian Church and Growth Center is located on the corner of W. Fourth and S. Pleasant Streets (2 blocks south of 11 Mile and 3 blocks east of Woodward Avenue).

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