

BELIEFS Values

Don't step on my religion; I care about it too much



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

There are press reports about a bill in Congress to amend the Constitution to permit prayer in schools. I have written about this issue before but I would like to do it once more in hopes of making the reasons for my such an amendment crystal clear.

My chief reason for opposing organized prayer in the schools is that I don't want anybody to step on my religion. I care about it too much.

Let me be even more specific: I have prayed in synagogues, Russian Orthodox churches, Roman Catholic churches and in Baptist churches.

I don't feel comfortable praying along in every conceivable worship setting, but in these cases I have been happy to join in the prayers of my hosts. After all, it was my choice to be there.

However, styles of prayer which fit Jewish congregations, Orthodox and Roman Catholics perfectly don't always fit the community of faith to which I belong. I've lived where Southern Baptists are the majority, and although I respect them enormously, their way of praying is not quite the way I want my children to learn to pray. With all due respect, my own community has its own religious vocabulary and its own style of prayer. Some other community's religious speech may be admirable, but it is not ours.

Since my own church is in the minority almost everywhere, I would rather not take a chance on being overpowered by an incompatible majority. Nor would it make me happier for a team of students to create their own hybrid version of community prayer. A one-size-fits-all prayer really fits no one.

Some will charge that I'm making a mountain out of a molehill - that the differences between religions are entirely superficial and not worth making a fuss over. I would respond that such a point of view is most likely to come from someone who doesn't know much about any particular religion, or doesn't really care much about matters of faith.

My argument is not that religious faiths other than my own are contemptible. My argument is that for those who are close to a particular tradition, the specifics of that tradition do matter.

Mormons and Christian Scientists believe and pray in ways quite distinct from each other. They can't be homogenized without doing violence to the very essence of their character. The same is true for us who belong to the every day, old-line Protestant churches whose traditions may seem imprecise to some.

To those whose connection with those churches is more than casual, the traditions of our "communities" churches represent quite specific beliefs, styles, and language. In short, one of the purposes of the church to which I belong is to pass on to another generation ways of believing and praying - ways that are similar to the ways of some others, but vastly different from the ways of other religious communities.

I claim the right to be who we are without apology, and that means the right not to have our tradition overridden, held in contempt, ignored or combined with some other - no matter how benevolent the motives. Isn't it reasonable to expect tax-supported schools to keep their distance when it comes to influencing the ways my children learn to pray? My second thought is this: What I expect for my own community, I owe to other communities. If I want our ways to be respected in the public arena, then I should equally defend the rights of other communities to be respected.

When it comes to school prayer - whether organized by well-meaning school administrators, teachers or teams of students - respect means leaving it alone.

Messenger from page B5

11, Ann Oberls will present a service of traditional American songs during a family sing-along. Readings speaking to the Universalist tradition also will be a part of the service. Call (810) 478-7272.

**NEW MINISTRY**  
"In Full Bloom," an introduction to The Peaceful Waters Ministry, will be held from 4-7 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 11, at Bohannan Hall, 25638 Lahser, one block north of 10 Mile, Southfield. Guest speaker will be Evangelist Renayo Coles, who founded the specialized ministry dubbed "Evangelism on the Move" with all of womankind in mind. Voices of Liberty will be the guest choir; refreshments will be served. Make reservations before Aug. 5 by calling (810) 569-1459. Seating is limited.

**OUTDOOR WORSHIP**  
First United Methodist Church, 1599 W. Maple Rd., Birmingham, holds summer outdoor worship services at 7:30 p.m. each Wednesday through Aug. 14 in the Chambliss Outdoor Worship Center. In the event of inclement weather, the half-hour services are moved indoors. Refreshments follow. For more information, call (810) 646-1200.

**SABBATH UNDER THE STARS**  
Temple Israel, 6725 Walnut Lake Road, West Bloomfield, invites the community to celebrate Sabbath services under the stars. The services will begin at 8 p.m. every Friday through Aug. 16, weather permitting. Casual dress, no jeans, is suggested. For more information, call the Temple office at (810) 661-5700.

**ADULT STUDY**  
"Gateways," a series of pre-Holiday adult Jewish study events runs from Aug. 15 to Sept. 7 at Cong. B'nai Moshe, 6800 Drake, West Bloomfield. The series reflects the traditional Jewish view that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur do not exist in a vacuum but rather the climax of a season of the Jewish calendar set aside for personal reflection and study. "Gateways" is a project of B'nai Moshe's Lifelong Learning Committee, co-chaired by Ruthellen Kass Singer of Farmington Hills and Nancy Kaplan of West Bloomfield. There is no charge and refreshments will be served. Call (810) 788-0600 to register.

**TEACHERS SOUGHT**  
William Tyndale College seeks instructors in Spanish and African American Literature to teach this fall. If you are a committed evangelical Christian with a master's degree, please forward your resume to the college at 36700 W. 12 Mile, Farmington Hills, MI 48331, or fax it to (810) 563-5963.

**FAMILY REUNION**  
The E.J.C. Reunion Committee has announced plans for a reunion of the families of the original members of the Evergreen Jewish Community/Evergreen Jewish Congregation, 1951-1961 to be held on Oct. 27. A list of names and addresses is being prepared for a mailing that will be going out shortly. Former families of the E.J.C. are urged to call the Reunion Committee, Shirley and Harry Shiozaki, (810) 352-8309, or Bernice and Al Keener, (810) 661-1096.

**CARILLON RECITAL**  
Christ Church Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills will host a Aug. 18 concert of the oldies, favorite tunes from the decades of the horseless carriage to the years of big-time horsepower, played on the 60-bell Wallace Carillon. Carillonists Jenny King, a carillonist at Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit, and Dennis Curry, carillonist and assistant organist at Kirk in the Hills Presbyterian Church in Bloomfield Hills, will perform. Auto collectors and car club members will display their prized possessions. The 4 p.m. concert follows the Woodward Dream Cruise along Woodward in southern Oakland County. The concert is part of the free Christ Church Cranbrook Summer Carillon Recital Series, which features performers with a Michigan connection, each Sunday afternoon through Aug. 25. Bring a blanket or lawn chair or stroll Cranbrook Gardens just across the street.

**STUDENT SEARCH**  
Openings are available for the 1996-97 school year in grades preschool through eighth grade at St. Matthew Lutheran School, 2020 S. Commerce, Walled Lake. Scholarships are available. Call (810) 624-7878.

**SUMMER SERVICES**  
Summer services are scheduled for 10 a.m. Aug. 4 and 11 at Universalist Unitarian Church of Farmington, 25301 Halsted Road, Farmington Hills. On Aug. 4, Gwen Foss, a church member, will present "Harmony and Controversy: 147 Years of Universalism in Farmington," a review of the history of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Farmington and a look at the people and events that have helped shape it over the years. Founded in 1849 by architect and undertaker F.F. Lyon, the church's history in many ways mirrors that of the larger Universalist denomination. On Aug. 11, Ann Oberls will present a service of traditional American songs during a family sing-along. Readings speaking to the Universalist tradition also will be a part of the service. Call (810) 478-7272.

Or sit in inside the church and enjoy the performance via an audio/video monitor. Doents will answer questions about the historic church building at 3 p.m. before each concert.

**WOMEN'S FORUM**  
Southfield-based Family Victory Fellowship will sponsor its fourth annual women's conference, entitled "Breakthrough '96," from Sept. 6 to 7. Emphasis is to address and meet the challenges faced by women today regarding divorce, raising children, relationships and gaining financial freedom through wise shopping tips. A Saturday workshop is planned especially for teens. The free forum will include local and nationally-known speakers and teachers: Sylvia Jordan, wife of Pastor Larry Jordan, Family Victory Fellowship Church; Francine Norman of Dallas; and Shanna Johnson of Harbour Island, Bahamas. The daily schedule is 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday through Saturday with evening sessions at 7 p.m. The location is the Best Western Executive Hotel, 31525 W. 12 Mile, Farmington Hills. Call the church at (810) 354-1590.

**PROGRAM DIRECTOR**  
Jill Mason has joined the Southfield-based Ecumenical Institute of Jewish-Christian Studies as youth programming director. Mason formerly served as student service center director at West Bloomfield High School, where she developed and implemented programs for staff, students and parents. She has also been involved with the Ecumenical Institute's Ambassador of goodwill program for high school youth. A series of mini-workshops is being developed at the Institute for young people, youth advisers and parent-child groups on valuing diversity, gender issues, conflict management, communication skill, inter-generational unity and team building. For more information about the Ecumenical Institute and its programs, call Barbara Yuhans at (810) 353-2434.

**ECKANKAR SEMINAR**  
Attention, Oakland County residents: The 1996 Michigan Eckankar Regional Seminar will be held Sept. 7-8 at the Thomas Edison Inn, 500 Thomas Edison Parkway, Port Huron. The two-day weekend features a newcomer's workshop, talks, creative arts, workshops, round table discussions, panel discussions, youth activities and worship service. Guest speaker will be Jerry Leonard, Co-RESA from Virginia. Participants from all walks of life will share stories and experiences as they explore and discover the spiritual purpose of life. Eckankar, the Religion of the Light and Sound of God, teaches how to have a firsthand experience in spiritual matters through contemplation. To reserve a room for the weekend seminar, call the Thomas Edison Inn at (810) 984-8000 by Aug. 23. For more information, call Helen North, Michigan Sat-sang Society public information director, at (313) 243-5728.

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