

Schools vary responses to ban on prayers

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dents around the country faced questions about how to conduct their ceremonies without breaking the law. Two organizations were quick to try to tell them.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which represented Weisman, and the Rev. Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice sent thousands of letters arguing respectively, that no prayers were appropriate and that there were ways around the court ruling.

Goshen (Ind.) Community Schools Superintendent Kenneth Blad said the Weisman ruling led him to ask attorneys to review the district's practices. They recommended formalizing the policy followed since before he became superintendent.

"For years we've had students determine their own graduation program," Blad said. "They've always been in charge. If by secret ballot they decide to have prayers, they'll include them."

When he reported to the school board that the Indiana Civil Liberties Union had sent a letter threatening legal action over prayers at graduations, "my phone rang off the hook," he said. At a subsequent meeting, 200 people showed up to support the board in formalizing the long-standing practice of permitting students to pray if they wanted to during graduation.

Blad, a Catholic, said he heard only support for permitting prayers from the mostly Mennonite community in north-central Indiana.

The local ministerial organization in Boyertown, Pa., about 20 miles south of Allentown, was prepared for a fuss in their school district over application of the Weisman ruling, said Father Robert C. Quinn, pastor of St. Columbkil Parish. But it never came.

The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators advised members to avoid making religion part of commencement ceremonies, but Father Quinn said nothing changed in Boyertown. A student-led prayer — organized by the clergy — has always taken place at graduation as well as a baccalaureate ceremony on the school grounds, said Father Quinn.

"Technically we 'rent' the room, though no cash changes hands," he said. The ministers were prepared to change the arrangements if pressed, but questions never arose.

Meanwhile, in southwestern Virginia, hundreds of students in four counties left classes for a day or two during mid-May to protest a ban on prayers at graduation.

William Johnston, administrative assistant for Wise County Public Schools, says the district has always followed the letter of the law about prayers in school settings.

But even if students plan a graduation,

principals must approve the program, he said. That makes it an official school function, which precludes any mention of God or religious beliefs.

"If a student stands up and gives a prayer outside the set program, that's a matter of individual free speech" and not subject to constitutional challenge as long as no one in the administration was aware of it ahead of time, Johnston said.

Although Wise County is in the heart of the Bible Belt, Johnston said prayers have not in recent history been included in graduation ceremonies. Only since the Weisman ruling has the subject even come up, he said. The current local debate also focuses on prayer during athletic events and in the classroom.

Father Thomas Collins, pastor of St. Anthony Parish in Norton, Va., just down the road from Wise, believes the wave of student protest is mostly a matter of rebelling against outside interference.

"They don't like the idea of people from the outside imposing rules on them," Father Collins said of his community. While Protestant fundamentalists seem to be encouraging students and their parents to press for prayer, he thinks the ACLU letter fired people up.

In one nearby district "they've become so paranoid that the principal wanted the valedictorian and salutatorian to submit their speeches ahead of

time so he could review them for any mention of God," Father Collins said.

High school graduation is an especially significant milestone in the poor, coal-mining towns around Norton, Father Collins said. Area residents are particularly sensitive to the idea of "some high-powered lawyer from out of town" telling them what to do at their graduations.

Baccalaureate ceremonies are also historically important, even though they're unofficial as far as the schools are concerned. Norton graduates, including the two or three from his small parish, have been invited to an ecumenical baccalaureate.

And Johnston said just about every church in the area makes a special point of recognizing graduates from their congregations during regular services around the end of the school year.

"It's a very important event here," he said.

In Tennessee, Gov. Ned McWherter said he would not veto a bill to allow student-initiated prayer at noncompulsory school events such as assemblies, sports events and graduations.

State Attorney General Charles Burson had said the bill's earlier versions were unconstitutional, but he had yet to give his opinion on the final measure. McWherter said he would wait for Burson's review before deciding whether to sign the bill or let it pass into law without his signature.

@bituaries

Nola M. DeRouen, 69; longtime proponent of Catholic education for minority students

ROCHESTER — Nola M. DeRouen, whose work with the Mother Cabrini Circle enabled hundreds of minority high school students to attend Catholic schools, died at The Genesee Hospital in Rochester on Saturday, May 1, 1993, following a long illness. She was 69 years old.

A Mass of Christian Burial for Nola was celebrated at Immaculate Conception Church, 445 Frederick Douglass Circle, on Wednesday, May 5.

Born Sept. 17, 1923, in Broussard, La., Nola moved to Rochester in her 20s. She later became active at Immaculate Conception Parish and Rochester's Mother Cabrini Circle, serving as the organization's president for more than 20 years. Group members raised money to help pay Catholic school tuition for minority high school students up until the 1970s.

"I would number in the hundreds the students who were aided by the Mother Cabrini Circle," observed Father Paul Brennan, who served at Immaculate Conception Church from 1967-87. Father Brennan also celebrated Nola's funeral Mass. "Not only did they try to raise money for tuition, they did all kinds of things to keep those students in the Catholic schools."

Nola was at the center of those efforts to assist the students and to help break down racial barriers, added Father Brennan, who currently serves as pastor of Auburn's Sacred Heart Church, 90 Melrose Road.

"She worked closely with students and parents," Father Brennan said. "It was people like Nola that kept the vision in front of people."

In addition, Nola was involved in a variety of other charitable works in the

parish, serving on a number of committees and helping to create a used clothing store. Ill health forced her to curtail her activities in recent years.

Nola is survived by her daughter and son-in-law, Cynthia and Michael Powell of Rochester; a sister and brother-in-law, Mary and Fred Clay of Rochester; a brother and sister-in-law, Walter (district deputy of the Knights of Columbus Council 112) and Mary DeRouen of Rochester; six grandchildren; two great grandchildren; and a number of other relatives.

Interment was in Groveland Cemetery in Rochester.

Cohocton

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Pius V Parish in Cohocton and Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Perkinsville, to officiate at the baccalaureate service and to deliver the address.

He received the invitation at the parish's Christmas party, Father Manning said, adding "There's a tradition at St. Pius to have a Christmas party and to invite the senior class to the party."

Clark, who is a Baptist, said class members decided to ask Father Manning to officiate at the service even though only two of the seniors were Catholic.

"Father Manning has done a lot with kids (in Cohocton)," Clark observed. He also noted that St. Pius V Church was one of the town's largest churches and it could comfortably accommodate those people wishing to attend the ser-

vice.

The priest also helped the seniors plan the baccalaureate service, which will include songs, readings and reflections by students on their four years at Cohocton High School.

Other area clergymen have been invited to take part in the service, Clark observed. In addition, he said, invitations were sent to relatives, friends, faculty at the school and to school board members.

Wood said faculty members were free to take part in the service.

"If they happen to show up, it's their own free will," he said. "We don't encourage that or discourage that."

At the same time, Wood acknowledged that the service is especially important this year because it marks the school's final graduation.

"I fully expect both the graduation and the baccalaureate to be emotionally charged," Wood said.

Dorothy L. Jensen, 88; active in volunteer groups

Dorothy Lillian Jensen, actively involved in Rochester-area volunteering efforts for several decades, died on Saturday, May 15, 1993, at Hurlbut Nursing Home. She was 88.

In addition to serving for more than 40 years in various capacities with the Women of Rochester Rotary Club, Mrs. Jensen was also active with the Rotary Sunshine Camp and International Rotary Friendship Group.

Other organizations for which Mrs. Jensen volunteered included the Holy Rosary Society at Rochester's St. Anne Church, 1625 Mt. Hope Ave., where she was a parishioner; the Strong Memorial Children's Program; St. Joseph's House of Hospitality; American Red Cross; Boy Scouts of America; and the Ancient Order of Irish Immigrants.

She received citations for her service and dedication from the Rochester chapter of the National Cystic Fibrosis



Research Foundation as well as the American Cancer Society, Father Edward J. Flanagan's Boys Home, the Leukemia Society of America and the

Maryknoll Fathers.

In addition to her volunteer efforts, Mrs. Jensen enjoyed traveling with her husband, Henry H. Jensen, former deputy chief and senior inspector for the Rochester Police Department. According to Henry Jensen, he and his wife logged more than one million air miles together over their 68-year marriage.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held at St. Anne Church on May 21. Interment was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

In addition to her husband, Mrs. Jensen is survived by a son and daughter-in-law, Edward Jensen of Sebring, Fla.; a grandson, David H. Jensen of Fairport; five sisters, Genevieve Gauck, Rita Kemp, Mary Parcels, Monica Hass and Ethel Gleichauf; and a brother, Edward Hennessey.

Donations in memory of Dorothy L. Jensen may be mailed to the Rotary Sunshine Camp, c/o Marie Nasipak, 612 Shady Glen Circle, Webster, 14580.