



A lone man demonstrates in front of the Supreme Court March 29, while justices heard arguments in the Texas school district case. (CNS)

Court further restricts school prayer

WASHINGTON (CNS) — In rejecting a Texas school district's plan for allowing student-led prayers at high school football games, the Supreme Court June 19 added to case law limiting organized prayer in school settings.

The court's 6-3 ruling found that the Santa Fe Independent School District policy established "an improper majoritarian election on religion, and unquestionably has the purpose and creates the perception of encouraging the delivery of prayer at a series of important school events."

The policy created a system in which students would vote on whether to elect a student to deliver an inspirational message before each home game, replacing a previous system that involved a student council chaplain. It was never instituted because of ongoing litigation.

The district was sued in 1995 by two fami-

lies — one Mormon and one Catholic — who complained about an assortment of activities then allowed by the Santa Fe schools.

The suit mentioned the promoting of attendance at a Baptist revival meeting, encouraging membership in religious clubs, chastising children who held minority religious beliefs, and distributing Gideon Bibles on school premises. It also complained that the district allowed students to read Christian invocations and benedictions from the stage at graduation ceremonies.

By the time the case reached the Supreme Court, the district had established new policies addressing many of the issues, including the practice of having a student chaplain offer prayer before football games. The policy of holding student elections to decide whether to have a student offer a message before

games, was the only issue the high court considered.

Writing for the majority, Justice John Paul Stevens said the policy is unconstitutional because it "ensures that only those messages deemed 'appropriate' under the district's policy may be delivered." Stevens said that by its restrictions on the process, the district had failed to "divorce itself from the religious content in the invocations."

He also said that the proceedings leading up to the district adopting the policy left little doubt that "its policy involves both perceived and actual endorsement of religion."


Although the school district asserted that participation in football games is voluntary, Stevens said that "... pregame prayer has the improper effect of coercing those present to participate in an act of religious worship."




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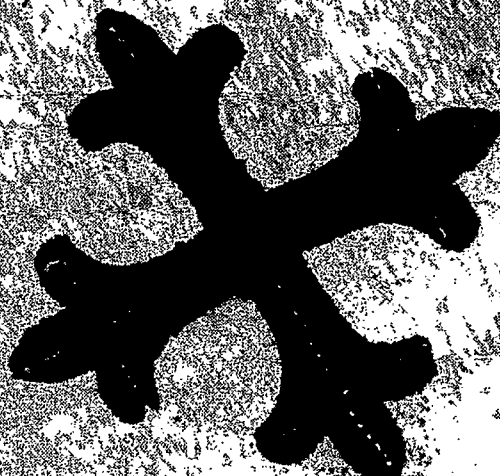
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Paths of two priests

By Rob Cullivan, Staff writer



Tales of Medjugorje inspired return to faith

In 1987, William F. "Mickey" McGrath read about a small town in what was then known as Yugoslavia where Mary had reportedly been appearing. Although he had been raised Catholic, something about the story of Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina moved him at a far deeper level than any other experience of his faith to that point.

"I felt of all the people on the planet, God was talking to me," the now-transitional deacon recalled. "I felt singled out by God, and that made me aware of his omnipresence, a sense of awareness that my life had meaning based on that reality."

Deacon McGrath, 36, also felt something else — God's affection for him personally.

"It's the same way when you fall in love with somebody," he said. "That person's glance means so much to you."

Since then, Deacon McGrath has been steadily trying to return that divine glance, and on June 24 will turn his whole life over

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Adventure formed past of this future clergyman

The Diocese of Rochester is about to ordain to the priesthood a 35-year-old man with one of the dirtiest minds a clergyman could probably possess. That mind belongs to Deacon Patrick Van Durme of Dansville.

"Real life is dirty," the transitional deacon said during an interview in a Rochester pub (where he drank only soda pop). "When you can get in the mud and really work with people there, that's a gift, a total gift."

In fact, his hands are not meant simply to hold chalices, they're made to bear callouses, he said, to be hardened by helping people carry the load of existence.

"The priesthood is being involved in people's lives," he said. "To touch life at the really, really ground level, to get your fingers dirty in the squishy, squishy mud of people's lives."

Deacon Van Durme led a colorful life before becoming a priest. In addition to the standard list of parish stunts many clergy have in their backgrounds as laymen prior to ordination, Deacon Van Durme is a U.S. Army veteran, and a former scuba diver, chef and outdoor guide. He was once even engaged to be married, though the wedding was called off. Indeed, this future priest is

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