

WORLD & NATION

K of C plans to support overturn of pledge ruling

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court decision declaring unconstitutional the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance when recited in public schools negated a major legislative initiative sponsored nearly 50 years ago by the Knights of Columbus.

The Knights, a Catholic fraternal order, successfully campaigned in the early 1950s to get Congress to include "under God" in the pledge.

"The Knights will support efforts to overturn the ruling," said Paul Devin, Knights executive vice president for legal affairs. The group is very proud of helping get "under God" in the pledge, he told Catholic News Service in a telephone interview June 27.

The 2-1 decision by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals June 26 said that use of "under God" in the pledge, as well as public school policies on students reciting the pledge, violated constitutional provisions against government establishment of religion. The case involved an atheist parent who said it was a violation of the Constitution for his daughter to have to listen to her classmates recite the pledge.

The jurisdiction of the court, based in San Francisco, covers nine western states.

Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh and the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights also criticized the appeals court decision. President Bush called the ruling "ridiculous," and the Senate voted 99-0 to support the pledge.

"I'm surprised that the two words rose to the level of violating the Establishment

Clause of the First Amendment," said Devin, adding that common sense would say including the two words is not a violation of the Constitution.

Devin noted that the phrase has been in the pledge since 1954. "In 48 years, there is no evidence of the emergence of a theocracy," he said.

Devin said that the case involved a student who was not compelled to recite the pledge. "The court found that the only coercion was that the student had to listen to the words. This stands the establishment provision on its ear," he added.

"This is an unnecessary attempt to remove any reference to God from public life," he said.

Devin said that the Knights' purpose in getting "under God" in the pledge had a secular as well as a moral dimension.

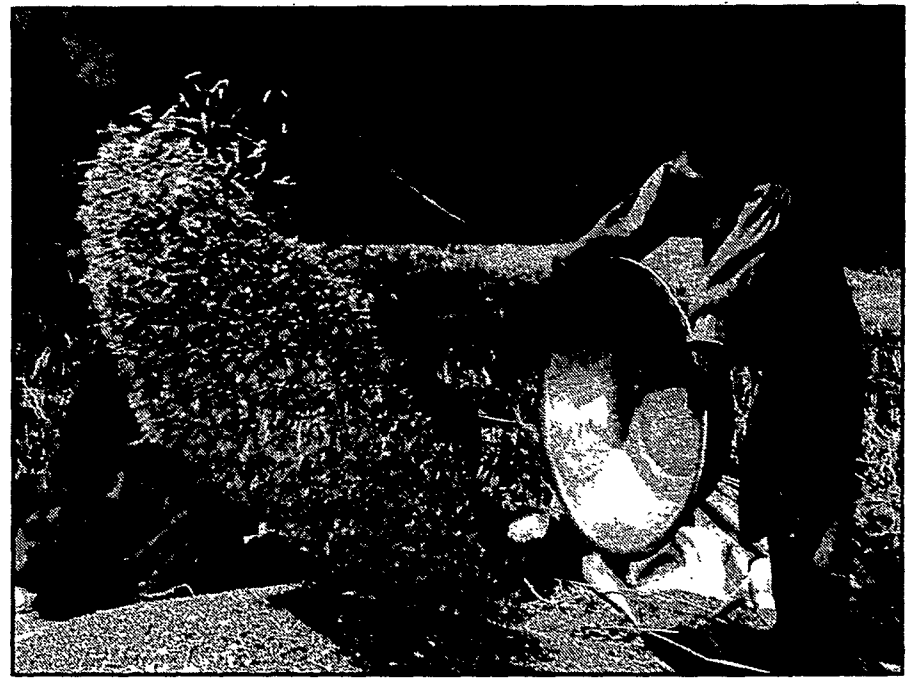
"It's helping us keep respect for the state in perspective," he said, noting that President Dwight D. Eisenhower supported including "under God" in the pledge.

Devin cited a letter by Eisenhower to Supreme Knight Luke Hart in 1954 after the president signed the measure into law. "These words, 'under God,' will remind Americans that despite our great physical strength we must remain humble," wrote Eisenhower.

Devin predicted that the June 26 ruling would not survive a Supreme Court review. While the high court has not directly faced the issue of the constitutionality of the pledge, it has ruled that the words "under God" and other phrases containing "God" do not violate the Constitution, he said.

Bishop Wuerl also expressed hope that a Supreme Court review would overturn the ruling.

"We should not and cannot remove all mention of God from public life, including now the Pledge of Allegiance, simply because a minority have chosen to reinterpret American history and tradition,"



Reuters/CNS

Afghans are still hungry

Ten-year-old Ali helps his father harvest wheat outside Kabul in Afghanistan June 28. Although some families were able to reap a harvest nine months from planting, there still exists a great need for food assistance after 23 years of war and a long drought in the country, according to the United Nation's World Food Program. In June the WFP was feeding 10 million people in Afghanistan and expected the figure to drop to 4.5 million by the end of the year.

said Bishop Wuerl.

"It is historical fact that this nation was founded under God and seeks every day to be blessed by God, including in Congress," he said.

William Donahue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, urged teachers to engage in "civil disobedience" by leading their students in the pledge.

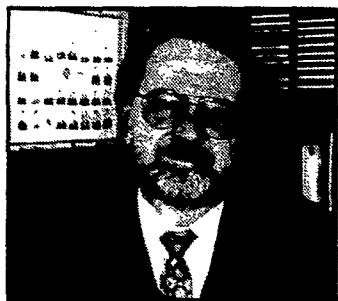
"It is vitally important that everyone watch on television the teachers being taken away in handcuffs for saying the Pledge of Allegiance," he said. "This will expose who the real authoritarians are

and thus set the stage for a real reversal of this madness."

The appeals court ruling said the pledge "impermissibly takes a position with respect to the purely religious question of the existence and identity of God."

The ruling added that reciting the pledge in public schools is approval of monotheism, "sending a message to unbelievers" that the state does not regard them as equal. It puts students who do not believe in monotheism in a position of making an "unacceptable choice between participating and protesting," the court said.

Thoughts to Consider



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Funeral Director

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Ugandans denied visas for World Youth Day

KAMPALA, Uganda (CNS) — Canadian authorities have refused visas to more than 400 Ugandan youths planning to attend World Youth Day in Toronto July 23-28.

The visa applications were rejected because the applications lacked certain supporting documents, Canadian officials said.

However, Ugandan officials said they have already spent \$32,000 securing airfare, registration fees and housing and have provided documentation to Canadian officials ensuring that all costs for the visa applicants were covered.

Among the information sought by Canadian authorities was proof that the visa applicants had the financial or family ties to Uganda ensuring their return once World Youth Day is completed and proof of the applicants' ties to the Catholic Church.

Ugandan World Youth Day organizers said Canadian officials told them that "given the economic and security situation in Uganda, it is likely that having failed to

meet the criteria listed above, members of the group would seek to stay in Canada."

A Canadian consular official in Kampala told a Ugandan organizer that the group could still reapply but that only "genuine candidates" would be granted visas.

"It is not enough for one to state that he/she is a student; one needs a genuine document to authenticate this claim," said D.S. Campbell, the Canadian official.

Campbell said students needed letters from their schools as well as their parents or caretaker to state that the applicant was genuine and had the funds necessary to finance his trip. He also said photocopies of documents such as bank statements, land titles and housing deeds were required. Older applicants needed proof of employment.

In Toronto, Dennis Mills, a member of Parliament appointed by the prime minister to oversee World Youth Day, told Catholic News Service that as long as Ugandan delegation members provided a letter from the papal nuncio or their local bish-

op stating their involvement in World Youth Day, the visa applications would be approved.

Mills said about 3,000 of the nearly 200,000 visa applications for World Youth Day had been rejected or delayed for similar reasons.

Without commenting specifically on the Ugandan case, Mills said Canada has tried to make the application process as easy as possible and has waived Canada's visa fees for World Youth Day participants.

Ugandan organizers expressed concern that the visas could not be processed in time for World Youth Day.

Ugandan church officials said they explained to Canadian Embassy officials that the applicants had received funding from the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the Canadian Catholic Church and that all participants were required to pay \$160 for registration fees and to raise at least \$240 for personal expenses. The cash for personal expenses has been raised and deposited into an account in Canada, Ugandan officials said.

Additional arrangements for affordable housing in Toronto had already been made for the Ugandan delegation, officials said.

In a letter to Basilian Father Thomas Rosica, World Youth Day national director, Ugandan officials said, "We find the conditions/criteria used to process the applications unfavorable given the nature of our pilgrimage."

The letter added that strict compliance to the regular criteria for visitors' visas to Canada left the group with limited chances of obtaining the visas.

World Youth Day officials have yet to respond to the letter, faxed June 18.

There's no such thing as a "drown-proof" child

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Heart Briefs

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American Heart Association