

## THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS

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## Religious Freedom or Religious Intolerance

Two decades ago the Supreme Court of the United States held that prayer and Bible reading in the school are unconstitutional. Now, the proposed amendment which would allow prayer and meditation in the public schools, has sought to overturn those decisions.

The vote in the Senate on March 21 on the proposed amendment met with defeat but was still disheartening. The closeness of the vote, 56 pro and 44 con, left the measure only 11 votes short of the necessary 67 votes (2/3 of the Senate), needed to pass a constitutional amendment.

Senator Jesse Helms, R-N.C., a stalwart backer of the amendment, proclaimed: "We have just begun to fight."

Talk among Reagan supporters is, "Well, if we can't get school prayer through the Senate, and if we can't get it through the Supreme Court, we need to change the makeup of the Supreme Court."

Those who support the amendment say these Supreme Court decisions have taken away the right to pray in school. They seek a return to a time when morning prayers were routinely recited out loud in public schools. They seek to repeal the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, the premise of which is that "both religion and government can work best to achieve their lofty aims if each is left free from the other within its respective sphere," and thus threatens our protected religious liberties. The amendment designed to promote "genuine religious freedom" could well contribute to religious intolerance.

The amendment does not limit the types of prayers which could be adopted or required. A teacher could well impose his or her own religious beliefs on all the students, regardless of their individual faiths. Supporters of the amendment proclaim that any student has the right to be excused from the classroom during prayer or Bible reading time. How many of you have personally experienced this or would want your child to? How many youngsters wishing to be accepted by their peers will have the courage to remain silent or leave the room?

All children should be given the right to pray silently if they so choose. It is the responsibility and right of the parents to teach their children the religion of their choice in their own home, synagogue, church or mosque. Instead of one nation under G-d, a constitutional amendment could well pit one religion against another. Let us continue forward and preach tolerance and brotherly love.

### On The Issues.... Ira Gissen, Director NC/VA Region Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith

In a wholly remarkable decision, the United States Supreme Court has dropped the wall separating Church and State and sanctioned government displays that are uniquely Christian.

With a fascinating display of judicial logic, the majority of the Court reasoned that: "Art galleries supported by public revenues display religious paintings of the 15th and 16th centuries, predominately inspired by one religious faith." Therefore, it concluded "The creche, like a painting, is passive: admittedly it is a reminder of the origins of Christmas."

History and religious belief were fused together in the crucible of the Court's penultimate argument which said: "It would be ironic, however, if the inclusion of a single symbol of a particular historic religious event...would

so 'taint' the city's exhibit as to render it violative of the Establishment Clause."

While attempting to establish the breadth and scope of its decision, the majority of five Justices planted the seeds of future Constitutional disputes. Thus the Court repeatedly sought to draw a parallel between the Pawtucket creche and "...the exhibition of literally hundreds of religious paintings in governmentally supported museums." To make its point, the Court elaborated on the particulars of the Pawtucket display. "... a Santa Claus house, reindeer pulling Santa's sleigh, candy-striped poles, a Christmas tree, carolers, cut-out figures representing such characters as a clown, an elephant and a teddy bear, hundreds of colored lights, a large banner that reads 'Seasons Greetings' and the

creche..."

Pointedly, the dissent by Justice Brennan, Marshall, Blackmun, and Stevens underscored the fact that: "The Court's decision implicitly leaves open questions concerning the constitutionality of the public display on public property of a creche standing alone, or the public display of other distinctively religious symbols such as a cross."

Curiously, the majority reinforced its judgement with the repeated observation that the creche was passive: "To forbid the use of this one passive symbol, the creche...would be a stilted overreaction contrary to our history and to our holdings."

Does that mean that a Nativity tableau portrayed by human beings, rather than the inanimate figurines of Pawtucket, would be unacceptable?

## From My Desk . . .

Two events of great significance in the development of the JCC's role in the community will take place during the following month. On April 9 the JCC will hold its annual meeting, electing officers and board members for the coming year and beyond. The slate of nominees listed in this issue illustrates our success in forming a board that truly represents a cross-section of our membership. This year will be a critical one for the "J" and we are confident that the new board of the Center will provide the kind of leadership required for the tasks ahead.

We are in the process of organizing a comprehensive long-range planning effort in which this board will spearhead the creation of policies, procedures and guidelines for the new facilities. In the area of program, we have discussed setting up a structure which will enable our various committees to have direct input in fashioning an expanded program and

service format. This approach will be somewhat analogous to the frame work established by the Foundation to ascertain the community's perspective on the building of the physical plant. Our goal is to offer a diverse well-rounded program for Center members right from the start of our occupancy at the new "J."

Another occurrence of perhaps equal significance will be the community-wide Israel Independence Day celebration to take place on May 6. This event chaired by Peggy Gartner, program vice president of the JCC, and Simon Estroff, representing the Charlotte

Federation, will bring together the synagogues and virtually every other Jewish organization or institution in the city. The Center, with an eye towards building coalitions and pooling resources, has led the way in broadening the scope of our community salute to Israel. We anticipate this to be only the beginning in the



Marty Schmeer  
JCC Exec. Director

"J's" effort to coordinate community services and to offer joint programming. Further details concerning the Yom Ha Atzmaut celebration are included in this issue.

We look forward to your support and participation at these two meaningful and significant events, and we hope that you will share in our enthusiasm for the future of the Charlotte Jewish Community.

## Holocaust Memorabilia Sought

North Carolina residents who are either survivors of the Holocaust, children of survivors or who were liberators of the camps as part of the U.S. Army, are being asked to search their personal belongings for items related to the Holocaust or to Jewish life in Europe before or during WWII.

The request is being made by Celia Scher, Susan Cernyak Spatz and Kitty Huffman, Charlotte's delegates to the Governor's Commission on the Holocaust.

The Commission recently released "The Holocaust, A North Carolina Perspective." This 13 minute slide and cassette tape presentation has attracted attention across the state. In Charlotte it has already been the focus of a half hour program on WSOC TV and will be shown in schools, churches and to civic groups around the area.

The program combines historical material on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust with photos of North Carolina residents and their taped recollections.

The Charlotte members of the Commission hope to make the presentation particularly relevant to this area by adding materials from local residents.

Anyone having such materials including documents, photos, objects, etc. should contact Mrs. Celia Scher by calling the Federation office Mon.-Fri., 9-5, at 372-4688.

Happy Pesach  
from  
the CJN

We encourage our readers' viewpoints. Letters should be submitted typewritten and double-spaced and signed. We reserve the right to edit.

