

INFORMATION

from Focus on the Family

Taking Religion Seriously in Public Schools

"It is extremely disturbing to realize that the massacre in Littleton is but the latest in a long line of similarly violent incidents, in Springfield, Oregon, Paducah, Kentucky and Jonesboro, Arkansas, among others. Why are such utter horrors becoming almost commonplace across the American landscape? It's my belief that the commentators and talk show hosts often miss the mark. The problem is not the availability of guns, nor is it the 'southern culture' that was blamed after the shootings in Jonesboro. The issue is not with what is in a child's hand, but with what is in his or her heart."

—Dr. James Dobson

What can be done to address the hearts of students in public schools? What can parents, students and teachers do to expose students in public schools to the truth of Christianity?

Whether you are a student, parent or teacher, you can do more than you think! The following are some of the *legal* ways that parents, students and educators can become active in taking the hope of Christ to their local public school. Do not be intimidated about trying these activities because the law permits all of them.

1. Contact church or para-church groups active on campuses to learn how you can help participate in already existing ministries in schools. There are a variety of groups that seek to minister to public school students in a variety of ways. Below are some of the organizations.

Student Venture

Student Venture offers resources and programs for students such as weekly meetings, discussion groups, focused one-to-one counseling, leadership training, conferences and retreats. In all these activities, students are encouraged to develop their Christian life.

Address: 100 Lane Hart Drive, 3200
Orlando, FL 32832

Web site: www.studentventure.com

Phone: (800) 699-4678

Fax: (407) 826-2247

E-mail: venture@ccci.org

Young Life

Young Life is a mission community of Christ-centered people committed to reaching adolescent youth with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Address: P.O. Box 520
Colo. Spgs., CO 80901

Web site: www.younglife.org

Phone: (719) 381-1800

Youth for Christ (YFC)

YFC's vision is to see every young person, in every people group, in every nation have

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80995

P.O. BOX 9800, STN. TERMINAL, VANCOUVER, B.C. V6B 4G3

the opportunity to make an informed decision to be a follower of Jesus Christ and become part of a local church.

Address: P.O. Box 228822
Denver, CO 80222
Web site: info@yfc.net

Phone: (303) 843-9000
E-mail: yfc@gospelcom.net

Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA)

The mission of FCA is to present to athletes and coaches, and all whom they influence, the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the fellowship of the church.

Address: 8701 Leeds Road
Kansas City, MO 64129-1680
Web site: www.fca.org

Phone: (800) 298-0909
E-mail: fca@fca.org

2. Start a Student Prayer Group or Bible Club on Campus. Student-led prayer groups and Bible clubs are entirely legal. In addition to the organizations mentioned above, there are some additional ministries that help students start these groups.

Revival Generation

An organization devoted to starting prayer groups on high school campuses.

Address: P.O. Box 581
Orange Park, FL 32067-0581
Web site: www.revival-generation.org

Phone: (800) 484-1074
E-mail: rgmi@revival-generation.org

See You at the Pole

Always scheduled for the third Wednesday in September at 7 a.m. local time. This annual event encourages students to gather in prayer around their schools' flagpoles. In addition, adults may wish to contact the following organization about starting adult-led Bible clubs after school:

Web site: www.syatp.com
E-mail: pray@syatp.com

Phone: (858) 457-1111

Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF)

CEF is a Bible-centered, worldwide organization whose purpose is to evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel and disciple them in the local church for Christian living.

Address: P.O. Box 348
Warrenton, MO 63383-0348
Web site: www.gospelcom.net/cef

Phone: (636) 456-4321

3. Start a Released Time Program. Released time is a period during the school day when children are allowed to leave the school grounds for religious education. The idea of released time originated in the early part of this century when religious leaders became concerned that not enough was being done to teach children about the Christian faith. In 1914, a school superintendent from Gary, Indiana, devised the concept of released-time programs to meet this need. Despite the fact that the U.S. Supreme Court declared released time constitutional in *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952), many people do not know about this opportunity to provide children with Christian education during school hours. Indeed, released time is one of the nation's best-kept educational

secrets. Those interested in starting a released time program should contact the following ministries:

The Fellowship of Christian Released Time Ministries

This Fellowship offers a number of pamphlets that explain how concerned parents, churches and educators can start a program in their district or improve an existing one.

Contact: John Atkinson
Address: 5722 Lime Ave.
Long Beach, CA 90805
Web site: www.rtce.org

Phone: (562) 428-7733
(800) 360-7943
E-mail: rtce@integrity.com

4. Encourage Teachers to Take Religion Seriously in the Curriculum. A couple of helpful books have been published that would help teachers include religion in the curriculum.

Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum by Warren A. Nord and Charles C. Haynes. Alexandria, VA: Association of Curriculum supervision and Development, 1998.

Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education edited by Charles C. Haynes and Oliver Thomas. Nashville: First Amendment Center, 1994.

You may also wish to contact:

Gateways to Better Education

The mission of Gateways is to give help and hope to Christian public school parents. Gateways also helps teachers by publishing holiday packets geared for educators that contain constitutionally allowed lesson plans on holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.

Contact: Eric Buehrer, President
Address: P.O. Box 514
Lake Forest, CA 92630
Web site: www.gtbe.org

Phone: (949) 586-KIDS (5437)
Fax: (949) 457-6361

5. Encourage Christian teachers to band together and form their own support and prayer groups. For information about forming such groups or for more information about a larger Christian teaching organization contact:

Christian Educators Association International

CEAI is a professional organization of Christian teachers, educators, principals, administrators and other school personnel. Founded in 1953, the mission of CEAI is to: "encourage, equip and empower Christian educators serving in public and private schools." Christian educators can join CEAI at a fraction of the cost of teacher unions and receive important benefits including: Professional liability insurance, subscriptions to *Teachers in Focus* and *Vision Magazine* as well as membership in an association that shares a Christian worldview.

Contact: Forrest Turpen, Exec. Dir.
Address: P.O. Box 41300
Pasadena, CA 91114
Web site: www.ceai.org

Phone: (626) 798-1124
(888) 798-1124
Fax: (626) 798-2346
E-mail: info@ceai.org

6. Join with Other Parents in Praying for Your Children.

Moms In Touch International

This ministry encourages mothers to meet once a week to pray for their children, their children's schools (including colleges) and their teachers and administrators. It also encourages local groups to act as a support base for the schools and their personnel. It also encourages groups of educators to meet and pray through its sister ministry, Faculty in Touch.

Contact: Fern Nichols, Founder
Address: P.O. Box 1120
Poway, CA 92074-1120
Web site: www.momsintouch.org

Phone: (800) 949-MOMS

For more information, request the Moms in Touch International Handbook from Focus on the Family [1-800-A-FAMILY].

7. Obtain Legal Advice about the Religious Rights of Students in Public Schools.

American Center for Law and Justice

The ACLJ is a not-for-profit public-interest law firm and educational organization dedicated to the promotion of pro-liberty, pro-life and pro-family causes. They publish an excellent booklet on "Students' Rights and the Public Schools."

Contact: Jay Sekulow, Chief Counsel
Address: P.O. Box 64429
Virginia Beach, VA 23467
Web site: www.aclj.org

Phone: (800) 296-4529
Fax: (757) 226-2836
E-mail: aclj@exis.net

Christian Legal Society—Center for Law and Religious Freedom.

This national volunteer network of attorneys and laypersons works to protect the religious rights of Christians and has been instrumental in litigation on important issues regarding clergy malpractice, tax exemption for churches and ministries, and equal access for religious groups in public schools. The Society also distributes two helpful pamphlets: "Religion in the Public Schools" and "Religious Holidays in the Public Schools."

Address: 4208 Evergreen Lane
Suite 222
Annandale, VA 22003-3264
Web site: www.christianlegalsociety.org

Phone: (703) 642-1070

Copyright © 2002 Focus on the Family
All rights reserved.
International copyright secured.
FX532



Revised 07/02