

# RELIGION

## Schools face legal challenges

A dispute over a faddish game has turned into a lawsuit accusing a school district in New York's Tony suburbs of promoting "satanism and occultism."

Three Catholic families say their religious freedom has been infringed by such standard school fare as an assembly featuring a man dressed up as Abraham Lincoln, a science class studying the leftover evidence of an owl's lunch and a history lesson in a cemetery.

School officials see the lawsuit as "a threat to schools everywhere," said Bruce Dennis, supervisor of the Bedford Central School District, about 20 miles north of New York City.

On Monday, several parents plan to join the schools' defense against the 1996 federal court lawsuit by filing a friend-of-the-court brief. The next hearing in the case is set for April 25.

"We can't take apart the science or English curriculum because something seems to go against some part of a particular small group's belief system," said one of the schools' supporters, the Rev. Paul Alcorn, a Presbyterian minister who has two children in the schools.

"We would dismantle public education in this country. Maybe that's what they're trying to do."

The dispute stems from a game called "Magic: The Gathering" that children started playing in 1995 in

the district in Westchester County's well-to-do horse country.

The Dungeons & Dragons-like strategy game, played with collectible trading cards, involves the supernatural. Some of the cards are lurid depictions of demons and one shows a woman about to be sacrificed.

"It's straight from Satan," said Mary Ann DiBari, a plaintiff who has 11- and 13-year-old granddaughters in the schools. "Human sacrifice, devil worship, spells."

Some formed a club that was allowed to play the game on school grounds but not during class. Players and the school district defended it as a "math game."

The lawsuit says that by allowing the game on school grounds, the district "officially promoted and endorsed" an occult activity, and promoted "satanism and occultism, pagan religions and New Age spirituality."

Besides the card game itself, the lawsuit complains that:

Third-graders were told to venerate pagan gods when a teacher had them make Hindu "idols." The teacher, Jackie Reizes, held up a paper elephant mask at a parents' meeting, said it was the idol referred to in the suit and added: "I think this speaks for itself."

On an excursion to a cemetery, fourth-graders were instructed to lie on the graves of dead children. The

school district's lawyer, Warren Richmond, said a volunteer was asked to lie on a grave to show how much smaller people were in the 18th century.

A man who dressed like Lincoln frightened some children when he said Lincoln believed in ghosts. "It was just a fellow who gave a speech on Abe Lincoln," Richmond said.

Third-graders were forced to study owl pellets, the regurgitated bones and feathers of the birds' prey. The lawsuit included that under "Earth worship and New Age spiritism."

Several youngsters, including the minister's son, staged a benefit tournament at his Bedford Presbyterian Church "so parents who were concerned could see the game, see the cards," Alcorn said.

"They were acting in a more mature fashion than the four people who called me and said how could I raise my son that way, how could I be a pastor," the minister said.

"The allegations in the complaint have seriously distorted what are really very normal educational practices," Richmond said.

Jordi Portell Weinstock, a senior at Fox Lane High School, said he was happy with his education.

"They teach you more and more a multicultural view of the world, in social studies and in English," he said. "It's important that we learn about other societies."

## The Festival of Religious Learning

The Center for the Study of Religion is sponsoring an exciting and unique afternoon event entitled The Festival of Religious Learning. This event will be a "collage of mini classes" during which participants will be able to select and attend three half hour classes from among approximately 15 different topics taught by instructors from more than ten different religious faiths.

The conference and ceremony will take place at the Smith Memorial Ballroom at Portland State University on Sunday, May 4th. Registration for the conference will be from 1:00-1:30. Classes will be at three different sessions between 1:30-3:30. There will be suggested donation of \$8.00 per individual, \$5.00 for students and seniors. The Circle of Peace Ceremony is free for all and will happen from 3:30-4:30, with the reception following until 5:00 pm.

There will be information tables provided by various participants, where people can obtain information and contacts for various religious communities and organizations throughout the Portland metropolitan area.

The intention of the Festival is to foster interfaith dialogue as well as further understanding of the various

experiences of religious faith and practice. The event is unique in that people from many of the world's religions are gathering together to teach and learn from one another, in the spirit that, "While learning about others, we learn more about ourselves".

The goal is to give participants "food for thought" and the resources and contacts to research further on the topics of particular interest to them. Likewise, we want to promote an environment of understanding without the pressures of proselytizing religious or political views.

In the spirit of understanding and commonality, The Festival will conclude with a Circle of Peace ceremony. This will be a time for representatives of the various religious traditions to offer a prayer or reading in support of our mutual respect as a path to peace throughout the world. Following the ceremony, there will be an opportunity for continued dialogue at an informal reception.

Participating Organizations:

Association for Communal Harmony in Asia, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Congregation Beth Israel, Congregation Neveh Shalom, Dharma Rain Zen Center, Earth and Spirit Council, Ecumenical Minis-

tries of Oregon, Reedwood Friends Church, Holy Greek Orthodox Church, Mittleman Jewish Community Center, Muslim Educational Trust, Portland Sakya Center, Portland State Campus Ministry and Unity World Healing Center.

Description of Sponsoring Organization:

The Center for the Study of Religion is a non-profit organization founded in 1992 for the purpose of enhancing understanding and respect between people of faith and about the experience of faith. The mission of the Center is to increase public knowledge of the religious traditions of the world, including their teachings, practices, and modes of spirituality. In so doing, it will enhance respect for the values of the various religions. The Center will be a vehicle for developing programs of local, regional, and global participation. It will involve religious communities in dialogue supporting the quest for meaning and wisdom. The Center for the Study of Religion currently offers credit classes at Portland State University, and is located on the campus.

For more information about this event, or The Center for the Study of Religion please contact Kari Grosvold at the CSR office, 226-7809.

## AJ Congress hails banning of huge cross

The following was released Tuesday by the American Jewish Congress:

By refusing to hear an appeal from San Francisco aimed at letting the city keep a 103-foot tall Christian cross in a public park, the United States Supreme Court once and for all told the city Tuesday, "You can't do it," said Fred Blum, past President of AJCongress' Northern Pacific Region, and a lawyer who played a major role in the case.

"The city of San Francisco said that the cross was a symbol of all San

Francisco," said Blum. "That tells me that I can't be considered a part of San Francisco."

Since 1991, AJCongress has been one of three organizations seeing the case through the legal system. The High Court upheld a federal appeals court ruling that the cross' presence on public land was a violation of the California state constitution's guarantee of the "free exercise and enjoyment of religion without discrimination or preference."

Earlier, a federal judge had per-

mitted the cross to stand, saying it was part of "rich history and culture of San Francisco." That decision, in turn, was overturned by the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled that the cross had "great religious significance."

"In terms of the AJCongress, we've been fighting this fight for a long time," said Blum. "The Supreme Court's refusal Tuesday to hear the case says that government cannot be the endorser of a religion whatever that religion may be."

## Coins of the Bible

On Friday, March 28, and Saturday March 29, 1997, the Red Lion Lloyd Center will be the site for a special exhibit entitled "Coins of the Bible." This exhibit is part of the festivities of the Pacific Northwest Numismatic Association's 48th annual convention and coin show.

This is the third year that the Willamette Coin Club is hosting the event. The PNNA is a non profit Oregon corporation whose goals it to promote the study of history and culture through numismatics, the study of money, from ancient to modern times.

For the "Coins of the Bible" exhibit coins will be used with photographs and other aids to highlight biblical passages and historical events. Admission for adults is \$2.00, children under 12 admitted free. Convention hours are from 10:00 a.m. till 6:00 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday.

## Church restoration in Egypt moves forward

The Egyptian antiquities department announced Tuesday it was looking for a contractor to restore one of Egypt's oldest and best known churches, the Hanging Church in Old Cairo.

The church, which is probably 1,300 years old, has had severe structural problems for years, compounded by the side effects of the high water table in the area.

The Supreme Council of Antiquities said it was inviting contractors to submit prequalification documents for a project to restore the church, the remains of the Roman fort supporting it and the Coptic Museum nearby.

The council has set aside about \$7.4 million for the restoration of the church alone.

The church, probably founded in the late 7th century but first mentioned in the 9th century,

takes its name from the way it rests on the bastions of the Roman fort. It suffered badly in the Cairo earthquake of October 1992.

Many of the walls are cracked and the priests say it is in danger of collapsing without quick restoration. Some of the low-lying parts are flooded with slimy green water.

The new secretary general of the antiquities council, Ali Hassan, said it had taken longer than expected to prepare the restoration plans because the council wants the job done properly. The contractors will try to match original materials.

The council said it was giving companies 15 days to submit the prequalification documents. They must find a subcontractor specializing in ground water control, it added.

## EU racism slammed by Greece

Greek Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos slammed Europe's reluctance to embrace Turkey because of its Moslem identity on Tuesday, saying it was tantamount to fascism.

Setting aside differences that brought the Aegean neighbours to the brink of war last year, the outspoken minister told a Balkan economic conference that Turkey's place was in Europe.

"Greece considers unacceptable the view that Turkey lacks the cultural characteristics to be in Europe," he said. "This is a tactic that we reject and we will fight."

European Union officials recently voiced concerns within the 15-member bloc about letting in a large Moslem nation. Turkey, which has a customs union agreement with the EU, has seen its bid to join the EU put off repeatedly.

Greece, which has long blocked closer relations between the EU and its eastern neighbor, rushed to Turkey's defence after the Moslem issue came out.

## 7th Annual RiverPlace Tulip Festival for Easter Seals



RiverPlace Esplanade  
Fri. - Sat., March 28 - 29 at 10 am

thousands of colorful tulips for sale  
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On Saturday: a visit from the Easter Bunny  
accessible candy hunt for children with disabilities, noon  
children's candy hunt, 12:30

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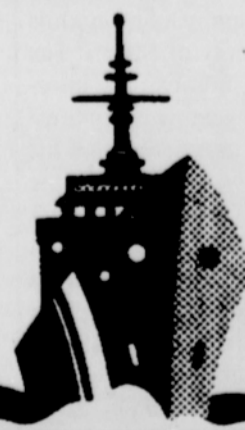
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The Rev. Alison Boyer, Rector

### Palm Sunday

8:00 a.m. Holy Communion  
9:30 a.m. Blessing of Palms at Dawson Park

10:00 a.m. Holy Communion

### Maundy Thursday

7:00 p.m. Foot Washing and Holy Communion

### Good Friday

12-1 p.m. Meditations  
7:00 p.m. Good Friday Liturgy

### Easter Sunday

8:00 a.m. Holy Communion  
10:00 a.m. Holy Communion