



Metro/Religion

School board invites religious study, draws questions from parents

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The district school board has invited students to spend an hour a week in religious instruction at churches, a plan that is prompting questions from parents.

If enough students are interested, the "Religious Release Program" would go into effect in September, board Vice President Jody Hahn said. "With everything that's happening in schools, we see this as a chance to do something for the students besides metal detectors and drug dogs," Hahn said.

In a May 5 letter to parents, the Augusta School District told parents that students would be bused each Friday to churches for 50 minutes of religious instruction, then bused back to school.

Students who do not participate would spend the time in study hall.

A letter dated May 11 said the district needs at least 80 percent participation by the student body to offer the program. Students must sign up by Friday.

The letters were sent by Superintendent Fred Brown and said "the religious instruction program will enrich the lives of our children." The program was proposed after more than a year's study involving the Augusta Ministerial Association.

Some parents objected to the program, saying it would leave some students out, force others to attend different parishes than their families, or usurp parents' responsibilities.

"I don't think it's right for a public school to promote a religious program like this that it seems could leave a lot of people out," said Wendy Mosley, parent of two school children ages 7 and 10.

"It's not just allowing an activity, it's promoting. It sure feels like it when my son comes home and asks, 'Can I go to the Methodist church because that's where all my friends are going?' because he doesn't want to spend all that time in a study hall," Mosley said.

"I have no objection whatsoever to the religious release idea, but isn't it the families' role to put those programs together?," parent Alan Jenkins said.

Wanda Conner, mother of three school children, endorsed the plan.

"In general it's a great idea," she said. "I think character education is shortchanged in our schools. Book smarts are important, but so is character education."

School board member Elizabeth Anderson called it "a step to trying to get the community and the kids involved as a whole. To get that bond you have to start someplace, and that's why I support it."

The Augusta School District, southeast of Eau Claire, has about 700 students.

"State law allows public schools to excuse individual students from class for religious purposes. However, federal school funds cannot be used for bus transportation," said Greg Doyle of the state Department of Public Instruction.

Jury selection begins for Michigan man in O'Hair disappearance

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair reveled in calling herself the most hated woman in America.

Now five years after she vanished along with \$500,000 in gold coins... sparking rumors she fled overseas with money from her atheist organization... a Michigan man who is the only one ever charged in her disappearance is set to go on trial.

Federal prosecutors say Gary Paul Karr, 52, of Novi, Mich., took part in a plot to steal the coins and kill O'Hair, her son Jon Garth Murray and her granddaughter Robin Murray O'Hair, whom she had adopted as her daughter.

Though no bodies were ever found, prosecutors say the three were dismembered and buried.

Jury selection begins today in Karr's trial on federal charges of conspiracy to kidnap and extort money from the victims. If convicted, he could face life in prison.

"We do believe Mr. Karr is a very dangerous individual," U.S. Attorney Gerald Carruth said.

O'Hair is best known for launching the legal challenge that led to the 1963 Supreme Court decision that effectively struck down organized prayer in public schools as unconstitutional.

In 1995, she and her two grown children vanished from San Antonio along with the coins. She wasn't reported missing until a year later when her estranged son, William Murray, called the Austin police.

Initial speculation was that the three were victims of foul play or merely ran off with the money from their organization, United Secularists of America. Some suggested O'Hair, who was age 77 and ailing, had gone

off to die quietly to pre-empt Christians who might have prayed for her soul.

"I think the evidence is just as consistent with them having done what they said they were going to do... leave town and get away from the IRS," said Karr's attorney, Tom Mills of Dallas. "We're just going to have to see what evidence there is that some violence happened to them."

According to court records, investigators believe the family was killed, dismembered in an Austin storage unit, then put into 55-gallon drums and buried.

Despite last year's searches of a South Texas ranch where an informant said the drums were taken, investigators have found no bodies.

Investigators have alleged that Karr, O'Hair's former office manager David Roland Waters, and Florida resident Danny Fry kidnapped the family and forced them to turn over the gold coins.

Karr, who has a violent criminal history dating back to the 1960s, has said the O'Hairs voluntarily left Austin with Waters, his former cellmate in Illinois.

In September 1995, authorities say, Karr went with Jon Murray to New Jersey to arrange a \$600,000 bank transfer. About a week later, Murray took delivery of approximately \$500,000 worth of gold coins.

Karr and Waters were arrested last year on weapons charges.

Waters has not been charged in the alleged plot. He is serving up to 60 years in prison for the weapons charges and a previous conviction for stealing from O'Hair's atheist organization.

Fry was found dead in 1995 in Dallas. His body was not identified until three years later because his hands and head had been cut off.

Pope's attacker says he almost walked away that day

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The gunman serving a life sentence for shooting Pope John Paul II in 1981 said Monday that he almost walked away from St. Peter's Square that day without pulling the trigger.

Mehmet Ali Agca was interviewed on a talk show late Monday on RAI state TV about the Vatican's revelation two days earlier that the so-called third secret of Fatima was a prophetic vision of the assassination attempt.

The church says the prophecy was delivered to three shepherd children when the Virgin Mary appeared to them in Fatima, Portugal, on May 13, 1917.

Speaking from his prison in Ancona, on Italy's east coast, Agca offered the public his version of the dramatic moments during the pope's general audience before he started firing.

"The pope had done his first swing," Agca said, referring to the pontiff's moving through the square in an open-topped white vehicle as thousands of faithful waved and cheered. "He had his back to me," said Agca, an alleged sharpshooter, contending that he refused to shoot any man who had his back to him.

Agca said at that point he was thinking that he would walk away, "throw the gun into the Tiber" River, which flows near the Vatican and take a train to Zurich, Switzerland.

Then "I heard this strong applause. I saw the pope in front of me, 50 meters (yards) away... something was dragging me (back). 'You must do it. You must do it,'" Agca said here recalled a voice in his head saying.

The pope had just picked up a blond, curly-haired toddler that a parish priest had held out to the pontiff, then gave the girl back. Agca said at that moment he pulled the trigger.

In the interview, Agca, speaking almost perfect Italian, insisted he acted alone. The Turk, who has been seeking a pardon from the Italian president, implied in his interview Monday that some unnamed authorities had suggested that he come up with some co-conspirators

in order to win early release.

"If there is nothing, you have to invent something to get out," Agca said. Most life sentences in Italy are commuted after about 20 years.

The pope chose the Vatican's No. 2, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, to reveal the meaning of the secret while the pontiff was at Fatima Saturday during his latest pilgrimage to the shrine to give thanks for surviving the shooting. Many believers had feared the secret was about some apocalyptic end for humanity.

The other two secrets had been revealed decades earlier. The visions foretold the end of World War I and the beginning of World War II, and the rise and fall of Soviet Communism.

Volunteers needed to help monitor street trees

CONTRIBUTED STORY FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Volunteers are needed to help monitor street trees training set for Saturday, June 10, from 9:30 am until 12:30 pm. Friends of Trees and its many volunteers planted 2,256 street trees this year. Now it's time to make sure they are watered and properly cared for during the hot summer months. Volunteers are needed to monitor the health of recently planted street trees by walking a route in Portland neighborhood (some route available in Vancouver, Oregon City and Milwaukie) during the summer months. No experience necessary.

All that's needed is an interest in learning more about proper tree care and a desire to help trees stay healthy. Friends of Trees provides training, material and supervision for Trees Team volunteers who spend 2-3 hours for two months monitoring neighborhood street trees. The Tree Team training is set for Saturday, June 10, 2000 from 9:30 am until 12:30 pm at the Kennedy School, 5736 NE 33rd (one block north of Killingsworth) in Portland. Friends of Trees' Tree Team is made possible by a special grant from Pacific Power. For more information or to sign up for the Tree Team, call Becca Chaffee at 503-282-8846 extension 13.

Obituaries

In Loving Memory of Raymond Everett Beal

A memorial service will be at 4 p.m. Thursday, May 11, 2000, in Killingsworth Little Chapel of the Chimes for Raymond Everett Beal, who died May 4 at age 74. Mr. Beal was born Sept. 7, 1925, in Butte, Mont. He moved to Portland in 1942 and graduated from Lincoln High School. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific. He was an electrician until his retirement in 1990. Survivors include his sons, Robert W. and Jason S.; daughter, Allie R.; sister, Margaret Wendell; brother, Elmo; and two grandchildren. Private interment will be in Willamette National Cemetery. The family

suggests remembrances to Portland Rescue Mission.

In Loving Memory of Richard Henry Washington, Sr.

A funeral was held for Richard Henry Washington Sr, on May 6, 2000 at Little Chapel of The Chimes. Richard Henry Washington died May 2, 2000 of a stroke at the age of 77. He was born in Ohio on January 29, 1923 and he moved to Portland, Oregon in 1963. Survivors of Richard Henry Washington, Sr. Wife Carolyn Washington of Portland, OR; Sheila Jones daughter of San Jose, Ca; and Richard H. Washington Jr. son of Portland, OR. 3 grandchildren and 4 Great-grandchildren.

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