

Teaching About Religion

1. Religious Holidays in Public Schools

If the purpose of studying a religious holiday is to provide instruction about religious traditions generally, rather than promote a particular religion it is an acceptable practice in the classroom. The historical and contemporary values and the origin of religious holidays should be explained in an unbiased and objective manner without indoctrination.

The study of religious holidays may be included in elementary and secondary curriculum as opportunities for teaching about religion. So long as such studies serve the academic goal of educating students about history and cultures as well as the traditions of particular religions, it is an acceptable practice in the classroom.

There is an important distinction between teaching about religious holidays, which is permissible in our classrooms as compared to celebrating religious holidays, which is not acceptable. It is acceptable to study religions to foster understanding and respect for differences in belief. It is not acceptable to use the study of religions to proselytize or to inject personal religious beliefs into discussions. Student initiated expressions to questions or assignments which reflect their beliefs or non-beliefs about a religious theme shall be accommodated.

Religious symbols may be displayed only on a temporary basis as a part of an academic program. Students may choose to create art work with religious symbols, but teachers are not to encourage or discourage such creations. Teachers may use religious symbols such as a cross, menorah, crescent, Star of David, creche, or symbols of Native American religions, etc., as teaching or learning aids so long as they are temporary in nature and do not promote or inhibit any specific religion.

Sacred music may be sung or played as a part of the academic study of music. School concerts should present a variety of music, which may include religious music. Concerts shall avoid a dominance of such music, especially when they coincide with a particular religious holiday.

The use of art, drama, or literature with religious themes is permissible if it serves a sound educational goal in the curriculum.

The Christmas holiday season may appropriately have activities related to Christmas and to Hanukkah. However, religious activities of any group or all groups should not dominate the activities. None of the activities should have the purpose or effect of promoting or inhibiting religion.

Students may request to be excused from classroom discussions or activities which relate to particular holidays. Such release from class will only be for short periods within the day. It is not an excuse to be used to release a student from school for an extended period of time.

If students are released from school for religious or other reasons, they will be expected to make up assignments or examinations which occur as a result of such absence/s.

2. Traditional Observances

Because baccalaureate service is traditionally religious in nature, it will be sponsored by the clergy of the community, separate from the district. Said service may be held on or in school property conforming to the district policy of fee payments and facility rentals as they relate to nonprofit organizations.