

PBS Bans New Religious Programming

✖ The Public Broadcasting Service on Tuesday banned its affiliate stations from airing new religious programming, citing what it says is a rule that has been on the books for 25 years.

The vote by the PBS board of directors permits stations that already carry “sectarian” shows to continue doing so, the *Washington Post* reported. The decision represents a compromise from a proposed ban on all religious broadcasts and prevents six stations from having to give up their PBS affiliation in order to continue broadcasting weekly Catholic Mass and other religious content.

Although PBS stations always have been required to present nonpartisan and nonsectarian programming, the definition of “nonsectarian” had been loosely interpreted, and the guidelines had never been strictly enforced, the *Post* said.

Last year PBS began reviewing how its rules on nonsectarian programming are applied in light of the transition to digital TV and the fact that many stations stream programs over their Web sites. Journalistic programs about religion or discussion programs that don’t favor a particular religious viewpoint are not considered sectarian.

Craig L. Parshall, senior vice president and general counsel for National Religious Broadcasters, said the PBS board decision reflects a disregard for the service religious programming provides local communities.

"The decision of PBS to prohibit its nationwide network of affiliates from accepting any new 'sectarian' religious programming of any kind reveals proof of what many media watchers have believed for years: that public broadcasting, though it has enjoyed the benefit of public tax dollars and special treatment, has harbored a stunning disregard for the significant role that faith-based programming can play in meeting the public interest," Parshall said.

Wick Rowland, president and CEO of KBDI in Denver, agreed. His station has aired a weekly Mass for several years.

"KBDI is a very eclectic television station with a huge diversity of programming with all sorts of political and social opinions," Rowland told Fox News. "No one would mistake us for Catholic television station."