

University of Minnesota Censors Christmas on Campus

University of Minnesota officials recently distributed a document titled, "Religious Diversity and the Holidays," to employees and student workers advising them to keep "inappropriate religious celebrations" out of public spaces. The document was distributed at the University as part of a "Dean's Dialogues: Respecting Religious Diversity in CFANS and at the University" event within the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences.

The handout, which originated from the school's Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action office, encouraged recipients "to recognize the holidays in ways that are respectful of the diversity of the University community." It listed several specific examples of "religious iconography" that were inappropriate for gatherings and displays at this time of year such as: "Santa Claus, Angels, Christmas trees, Star of Bethlehem, Dreidels, Nativity scene, Bows/wrapped gifts, Menorah, Bells, Doves, Red and Green or Blue and White/Silver decoration themes (red and green are representative of the Christian tradition as blue and white/silver are for Jewish Hanukkah that is also celebrated at this time of year)."

"Consider neutral-themed parties such as a 'winter celebration,'" the document read. "Decorations, music, and food should be general and not specific to any one religion."

Employees and student workers were also encouraged to report a bias incident of "inappropriate religious celebrations in their work or learning environment" to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action.

"The University of Minnesota has gone off the deep end with a

bizarre policy censoring Christmas and Hanukkah on campus,” said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel. “In the name of inclusion and diversity, the University is doing just the opposite. Celebrating or acknowledging Christmas is legal in universities and in public venues.”

This year, Liberty Counsel launched its 15th annual Friend or Foe Christmas Campaign. The campaign educates, and if necessary litigates, to make sure that Christmas and Christian themes are not censored. Liberty Counsel has been actively monitoring cases across the country where there is intimidation by officials and groups to remove the celebration of Christmas in public and private sectors and has successfully educated and reversed these anti-Christmas actions in all of these situations.

Liberty Counsel provides a memorandum to offer guidance to public officials and schools regarding the public celebration of religious holidays. For example, publicly sponsored nativity scenes on public property are constitutional if there is a secular symbol of the holiday in the general context. Privately sponsored nativity scenes or religious symbols are also permissible on public property that has been opened to the general public for expressive activity. No secular symbol is necessary in the context of private speech on public property.

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