

Graduation Prayer Challenges to Meet With Litigation

As students around the country are celebrating their graduation, Liberty Counsel is working to protect them by launching its annual “Friend or Foe” Graduation Prayer Campaign.

With the campaign, Liberty Counsel seeks to educate and, if necessary, litigate to ensure that prayer and religious viewpoints are not suppressed during graduation ceremonies.

“Students do not lose their constitutional right to free speech when they step to the podium at graduation,” says Mathew Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel and Dean of Liberty University School of Law. “To allow a variety of viewpoints except religious viewpoints at graduation is neither American nor is it consistent with the Constitution. While schools should not force people to pray, neither should they force them not to pray.”

Liberty Counsel will be a friend of schools that recognize the free speech rights of students and a foe to those that violate students’ constitutional rights. Liberty Counsel has published a free legal memo on graduation prayer which is available online. Students are encouraged to wear Liberty Counsel’s red “I WILL PRAY” wristbands as a reminder to pray. Students have the right to wear religious jewelry and to pray during noninstructional times during the day.

In a precedent-setting case against the ACLU, *Adler v. Duval County School Board*, Liberty Counsel won the right of students to pray or give religious messages at graduation. The case established the legal principle that public schools are free to adopt a policy that permits students or other speakers to present secular or religious messages, including prayer, at

commencement ceremonies.

In 2006 Liberty Counsel represented Megan Chapman, a graduating senior and class chaplain in Russell Springs, Ky., who had a court order forbidding her from praying during graduation. The order was obtained by the ACLU. The entire senior class reacted to the controversy by standing and reciting the Lord's Prayer, after which Megan stepped to the podium and shared what God meant in her life. After hearing about the situation, Dr. Jerry Falwell gave both Megan and her twin sister, Mandy, full scholarships to Liberty University. Megan has just completed her first year at Liberty University School of Law.