

SC School Lifts Ban on Religious Christmas Carols

A South Carolina public charter school has removed a ban on Christmas music after receiving a letter from Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) sent on behalf of concerned parents. School officials had prohibited students from performing the music to “Joy to the World” and “O Come All Ye Faithful” after students had already begun rehearsing the pieces for a concert.

A school official had initially claimed that some type of communication from either the American Civil Liberties Union or another group prompted the ban. The school looked into the matter, discovered that the official had actually acted on his own and reversed the ban after gaining a better understanding of what the First Amendment permits and protects.

“Schools shouldn’t have to think twice about whether they can allow Christmas carols, including ones with Christian themes that are naturally a part of the holiday,” says ADF litigation staff counsel Rory Gray. “We commend the school for quickly reversing the prohibition on such songs. It’s a shame that the pervasive climate of fear about Christmas that secularist groups have spread over the last several decades led some at the school to think that they had to ‘preemptively’ censor Christmas expression.”

York Preparatory Academy’s band director gave older students a choice of musical selections to perform at the school’s Dec. 19 winter concert. The students chose two songs that included the melodies from “Joy to the World” and “O Come All Ye Faithful.” After students had already begun practicing the music, the principal of the school excluded the songs and suggested that in order for students to play traditional Christmas carols, they would need to play songs from other

religions as well.

The Alliance Defending Freedom letter explained to the school that “every federal court to examine the issue has determined that including religious Christmas carols in school music programs fully complies with the First Amendment.”

“The Constitution clearly allows the inclusion of religious Christmas carols in school productions,” adds senior legal counsel Jeremy Tedesco. “Now that the school has removed its unnecessary ban, the students at York Preparatory Academy will be allowed to proceed with the full range of music they’ve been working on so hard.”

Alliance Defending Freedom sent a letter last week to more than 13,000 school districts nationwide that explains the constitutionality of religious Christmas carols in school productions, provides legal resources on other issues that may arise regarding Christmas and public schools, and offers free assistance to schools that need help.